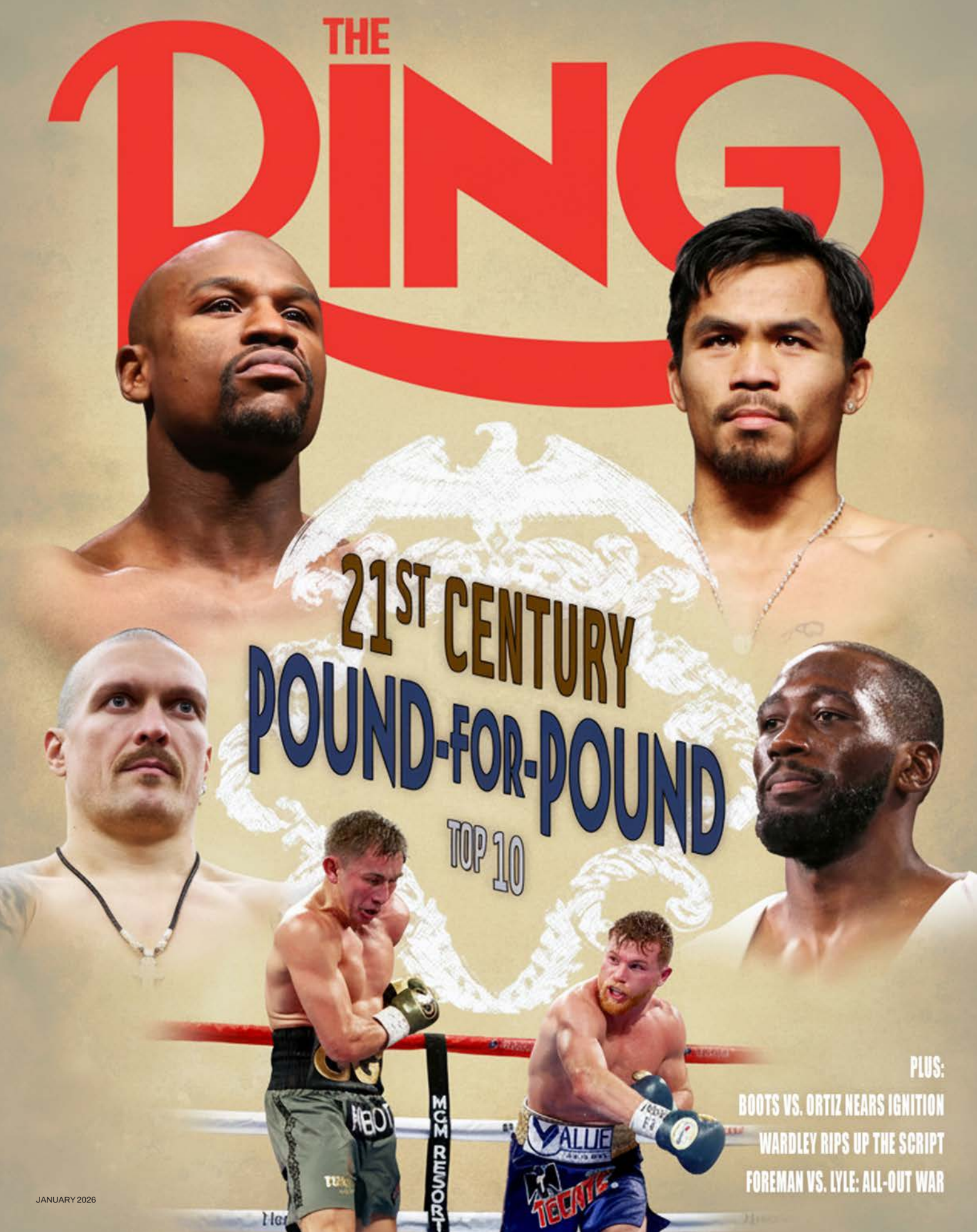
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21ST CENTURY
POUND-FOR-POUND
TOP 10
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JANUARY 2026

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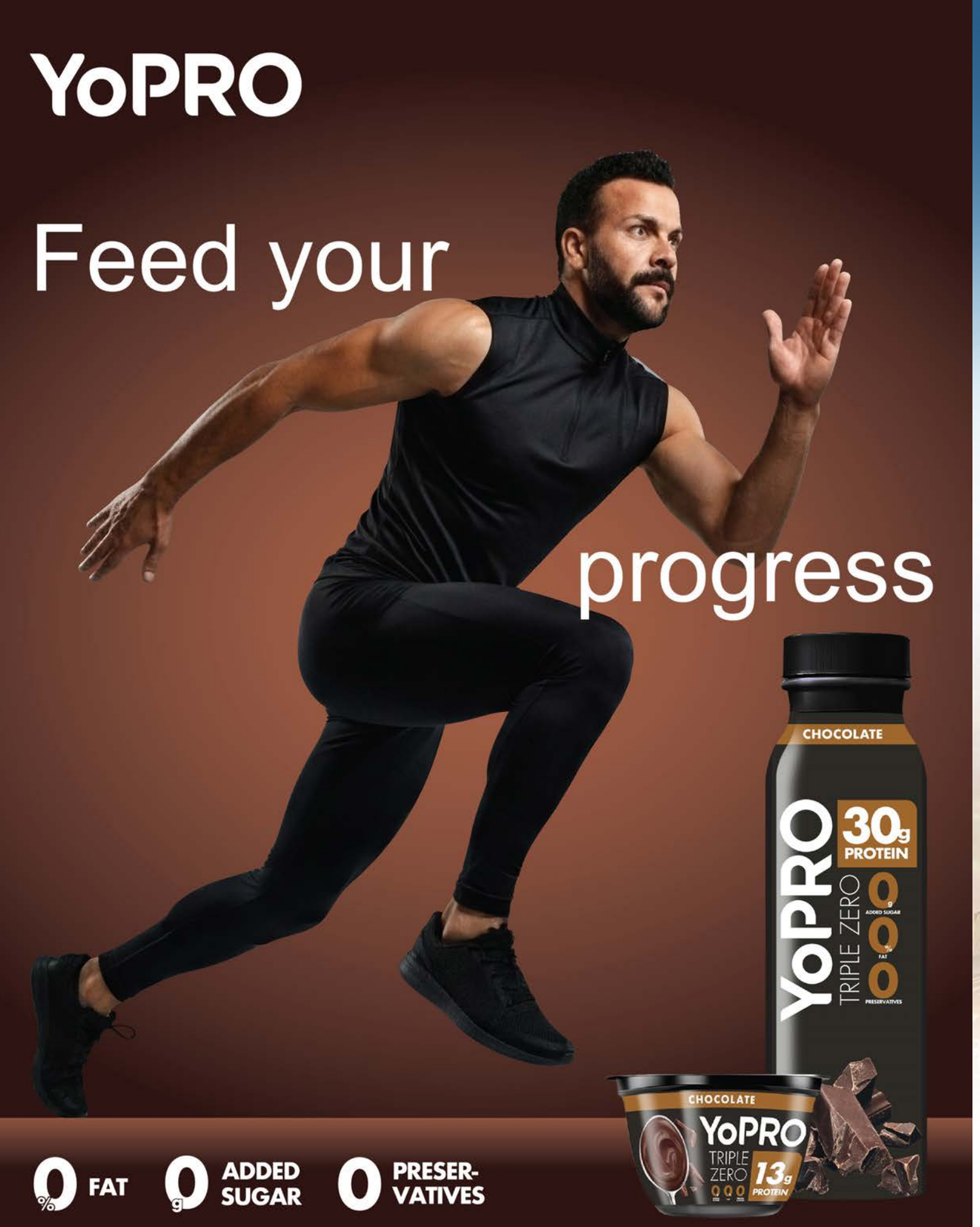

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OPENING SHOT

DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS: In November, Vergil Ortiz Jr. was in scintillating form when blasting out Erickson Lubin in two rounds at the Dickies Arena in Fort Worth. Southpaw Lubin made the mistake of going to the ropes early in Round 2, which invited the home fighter to let his hands go with a devastatingly accurate assault, punctuated by a series of rights. Lubin was out on his feet when referee James Green jumped in to save the stricken fighter from further punishment.

Cris Esqueda

THE RING

January 2026
Volume 103, No. 1

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THE RING (ISSN: 0035-5410) January 2026, is published 12 times per year by The Ring Magazine FZ, LLC P.O. Box 90254 Brooklyn, NY 11209. Postmasters: Send change of address Notices to: The Ring Magazine Subscriber Service Dept., PO Box 16027, North Hollywood, CA 91615-6027, Phone: 818-286-3101; rngcs@magserv.com. Single copy price $9.99 in U.S.A. ,10.99 Canada (£10.99 in the U.K.). Global Subscription price $60.00 for 12 issues plus S&H. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2026 The Ring Magazine FZ-LLC. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy of the content of advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: advertising@ringmagazine.com. U.S. / Canadian and International distribution by Comag Marketing Group LLC, 155 Village Blvd #200, Princeton, NJ 08540. UK distribution by Seymour Distribution Ltd., 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, England, EC1A 9PT. Printed In USA and the UK.

RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer

WITNESSING GREATNESS

Lunch with Larry Merchant is always a boxing history lesson.

Not long after I moved to Southern California, more than 30 years ago, I was honored to get to know two former contenders of boxing's golden age – Ray Barnes and Paul Andrews – as I made my way through the many boxing gyms in the greater Los Angeles area.

Barnes, a Ring-rated middleweight in the late 1940s and early '50s, went 10 spirited rounds with Sugar Ray Robinson in 1950. Andrews, a Ring-rated light heavyweight and heavyweight during the mid-1950s, dropped Ezzard Charles in a hotly contested 10-round split-decision loss in 1955.

They faced other future Hall of Famers – Barnes fought Cocoa Kid, while Andrews took on Harold Johnson (twice) and Joey Maxim – but I was most delighted by their tales of sharing the ring with two of the all-time pound-for-pound greats. Robinson carried an unfathomable 108-1-2 record into his fight with Barnes. Charles had taken Rocky Marciano to the brink in back-to-back brutal title bouts the year before he fought Andrews. What was it like facing a living legend? I had to know, and they had no problem telling me.

Barnes and Andrews are no longer with us and I miss our conversations. These days, the oral history of the golden age (and subsequent decades before my time) is passed on to me by those who witnessed it from outside of the ring – Larry Merchant, Doug Krikorian and Dave Schwartz.

Merchant, who will be 95 in February, made a name for himself as a sports columnist during the 1950s and '60s. He was ringside for legendary bouts involving Robinson, Kid Gavilan, Emile Griffith, Nino Benvenuti, Floyd Patterson, Sonny Liston and other Hall of Famers long before his 35-year stint

with HBO.

Krikorian, who is 82, is a former sportswriter for the Los Angeles Herald Examiner and Long Beach Press-Telegram. The Southern California icon covered Larry Holmes' championship reign and every bout between The Four Kings.

Schwartz, a nonagenarian like Merchant, isn't media. He's the founder of Rent-A-Wreck car rental company and a good friend. His father took him to his first boxing card in 1946 and he's been a hardcore fan ever since. Schwartz has seen Robinson, Carlos Ortiz, Jose Napoles, Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and prime Mike Tyson from the arena seats.

I see Schwartz at least once a week, usually at the Santa Monica College track where we talk about boxing's current events before Dave quizzes me with historical trivia. (Feel free to join us via my Instagram on most Sundays.)

Longtime friend and colleague Steve Kim coordinates monthly get-togethers with Merchant and Krikorian. It's lunch with Larry at the Water Grill in Santa Monica and dinner with Doug at Phil Trani's steakhouse in Long Beach.

Veteran manager Gary Gittelsohn, noted author and commentator Mark Kriegel and film producer Alan Swyer often join us with Merchant.

Respected trainer Rudy Hernandez, retired publicist John Beyrooty, former NBA player Mychal Thompson and a motley crew of boxing lifers and degenerates often congregate with us at Phil Trani's. Trust me, each gathering would make for a fun and educational podcast, especially the recollections of the "great old days" from the three elder statesmen.

However, this issue's cover story on the pound-for-pound best of the past 25 years is a reminder that I've witnessed my fair share of greatness. I covered every fighter who made the cover story's top 10, as well as most of the KO artists and fights of the 21st century listed in the sidebars.

My top 10 is slightly different from the consensus ranking presented in the cover story. I've got Manny Pacquiao at No. 1, Bernard Hopkins a lot higher, and Gennadiy Golovkin made my top 10.

But the order doesn't really matter. The fact is there are several great fighters who shined during the past generation, too many to limit to a top 10. The fighters who didn't make the cut are bona fide legends:

Roy Jones Jr., Oscar De La Hoya, Shane Mosley, Winky Wright, Joe Calzaghe, Wladimir Klitschko, Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales, Juan Manuel Marquez, Nonito Donaire, Sergio Martinez.

The criteria for pound-for-pound rankings varies. Natural talent, skill set, technique and dominance often factor in, but I focused entirely on accomplishments and quality of opposition with extra credit given to those who reached No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings and those who earned Ring and Boxing Writers Association of America (BWAA) awards, such as Fighter of the Year. Keep in mind I only took into account accomplishments from 2000 on. What they did in the 1990s, if they were active that decade, doesn't count.

Check out my top 10 list of the best boxers since 2000:

1. MANNY PACQUIAO – From 2001-2010, the PacMan won world titles in an unprecedented seven divisions – junior featherweight to junior middleweight. He earned Ring championships at featherweight, junior lightweight and junior welterweight by defeating fellow future Hall of Famers Marco Antonio Barrera, Juan Manuel Marquez and Ricky Hatton. Other Hall of Famers that Pacquiao defeated include Oscar De La Hoya, Shane Mosley, Miguel Cotto (for his first title at welterweight), Erik Morales (twice) and Tim Bradley (twice). Other notable victories include Keith Thurman (setting the record for oldest welterweight titleholder in 2019), Adrien Broner, Antonio Margarito, Joshua Clottey, Jessie Vargas, Lucas Matthysse and Oscar Larios. Amazingly, Pacquiao reentered The Ring's welterweight rankings following his draw with Mario Barrios in 2025 at age 46. He was the first Filipino boxer to reach No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings, The Ring's 2006, 2008 and 2009 Fighter of the Year, and was selected as the Fighter of the Decade (2000s) by the BWAA.

2. FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR. – From 2002-2012, Mayweather won world titles in four divisions, including The Ring lightweight championship (by narrowly defeating Jose Luis Castillo). He added Ring welterweight and junior middleweight championships in 2013 by outpointing Robert Guerrero and Canelo Alvarez. Mayweather defeated fellow Hall of Famers Pacquiao, Shane

Mosley, Miguel Cotto, Juan Manuel Marquez, Oscar De La Hoya, Ricky Hatton and Diego Corrales. Other notable victories include Zab Judah, Marcos Maidana (twice), Genaro Hernandez and Jesus Chavez. He was The Ring's 2007 Fighter of the Year and was selected as the Fighter of the Decade (2010s) by the BWAA.

3. BERNARD HOPKINS – From 2000-2005, Hopkins solidified his status as the finest middleweight champion of his generation. In 2001, he defeated Felix Trinidad to become the first undisputed champ since Marvin Hagler. Three years later, he was crowned the first undisputed champ of the four-belt era (in any weight class) when he stopped Oscar De La Hoya. Hopkins set the middleweight title defense record (20) in 2005, as well as the record for the longest middleweight title reign (10 years). From 2006-2014, Hopkins was an elite-level light heavyweight despite being in his 40s. He won The Ring light heavyweight championship by outclassing Antonio Tarver in 2006, set the record for oldest world titleholder in any weight class (46) by outpointing Jean Pascal in their 2011 rematch, then broke his own record by decisioning Tavoris Cloud at age 48 in 2013. Hopkins is also the oldest boxer to defend and unify world titles. He faced 21 Ring-rated fighters from 2000-2016, including five Hall of Famers (Trinidad, De La Hoya, Winky Wright, Joe Calzaghe and a faded Roy Jones Jr.) and 10 Ring champs (Jones, De La Hoya, Wright, Calzaghe, Tarver, Glen Johnson, Kelly Pavlik, Jermain Taylor, Jean Pascal and Chad Dawson). He was The Ring's 2001 Fighter of the Year and reached No. 1 in the pound-for-pound rankings.

4. NAOYA INOUE – The Monster won world titles in four weight classes from 2014-2023, including Ring championships at bantamweight and junior featherweight. He's a two-division undisputed champion (at 118 and 122 pounds) and will likely have made six defenses of the unified junior featherweight titles by the time this issue sees print. Inoue's signature victories include Nonito Donaire (twice), Stephen Fulton, Omar Narvaez, Ryoichi Taguchi, Murodjon Akhmadaliev, Luis Nery, Emmanuel Rodriguez, Marlon Tapales, Juan Carlos Payano and Adrian Hernandez. He's won Ring awards for 2018 and 2019 KO of the Year, 2019 Fight of the Year and 2023 Fighter of the Year, and he is the first Japanese fighter to reach No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

5. TERENCE CRAWFORD – Bud won world titles in five divisions from 2014-2025, including Ring championships at lightweight, junior welterweight, welterweight and super middleweight. He's the only male three-division undisputed champion of the four-belt era and the only four-division Ring champ in history. His signature victories include Canelo Alvarez, Errol Spence Jr., Shawn Porter, Viktor Postol, Israil Madrimov and Ricky Burns. Crawford earned the BWAA's 2014 Fighter of the Year award and is the frontrunner for The Ring's 2025 honor. He's currently No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

6. ROMAN GONZALEZ – From 2007-2016, Chocolatito won world titles in four weight classes – strawweight, junior flyweight, flyweight and junior bantamweight. He was Ring

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champ at flyweight and Ring-rated No. 1 in the other three divisions. He has faced 18 Ring-rated fighters since 2007, including Ring champs Juan Francisco Estrada, Akira Yaegashi and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai and respected world titleholders such as Brian Viloria, Carlos Cuadras, Edgar Sosa, Julio Cesar Martinez, Francisco Rodriguez Jr., Katsunari Takayama and Kal Yafai. The only definitive loss of his career – in my humble opinion – is the KO he suffered in his rematch with Sor Rungvisai. He is the first Nicaraguan boxer to reach No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

7. OLEKSANDR USYK – From 2013-2014, while fighting on the road and often in his opponent's home country, Usyk collected every major world title (including Ring belts) at both cruiserweight and heavyweight to become a two-division undisputed champion. His notable victories include Tyson Fury (twice), Anthony Joshua (twice), Mairis Briedis, Murat Gassiev, Daniel Dubois (twice), Tony Bellew, Marco Huck, Michael Hunter, Thabiso Mchunu and Krzysztof Glowacki. Usyk was The Ring's 2018 and 2024 Fighter of the Year and twice reached No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

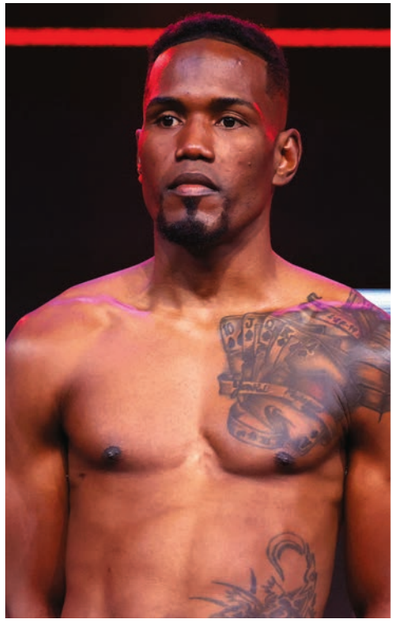
8. ANDRE WARD – From 2004-2017, Ward climbed to the top of the super middleweight and light heavyweight divisions, unifying world titles and earning Ring championships in both weight classes. His notable victories include fellow Hall of Famer Carl Froch, Sergey Kovalev (twice), Mikkel Kessler, Chad Dawson and Arthur Abraham. Ward was The Ring's 2011 Fighter of the Year, and he reached No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

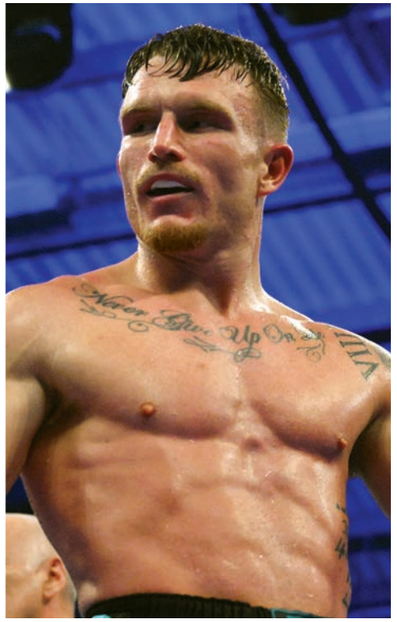
9. GENNADIY GOLOVKIN – From 2014-2022, Golovkin engaged in 14 world title bouts as The Ring's No. 1-rated middleweight. He unified three major belts and only came up short against Canelo Alvarez – via controversial split draw and majority decision loss – in two hotly contested, high-profile showdowns before regaining two titles. Golovkin, who was in The Ring's middleweight rankings for 11 years (2011-2022), faced 16 Ring-rated fighters, including Alvarez, Daniel Jacobs, Daniel Geale, David Lemieux, Ryota Murata, Sergiy Derevyanchenko, Martin Murray, Matthew Macklin and Curtis Stevens. His rematch with Alvarez was The Ring's 2018 Fight of the Year, and he was the first boxer from Kazakhstan to reach No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

10. VASILIY LOMACHENKO – From 2014-2018, Lomachenko won world titles in three divisions – featherweight, junior lightweight and lightweight. He won his first world title in his third pro bout. At lightweight, he earned the Ring championship and unified three major belts. Lomachenko faced 17 Ring-rated fighters (in just 21 pro bouts), including Jorge Linares, Guillermo Rigondeaux, Teofimo Lopez, Devin Haney, Gary Russell Jr., Orlando Salido, Jose Pedraza, Nicholas Walters and George Kambosos. He was The Ring's 2017 Fighter of the Year and the first Ukrainian boxer to reach No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

Well, that's my top 10. Let me know what you think by emailing comeoutwriting@gmail.com, or you can hit me up anytime on X or Instagram @dougiefischer. RING

Richard Pelham





Subriel Matias vs. Dalton Smith is a world title fight to savor.

EXPECT THE PREDICTABLE

By Al Bernstein

There are a number of solid matches on the docket for early in 2026. So it was a hard choice when I decided to do my column on a match that I see as kind of a North Star that would set boxing off in the right direction for its yearlong journey. It might be suggested that my neverending fascination (some might say obsession) with the junior welterweight division made my selection inevitable. I settled on the January 10 WBC 140-pound title match between beltholder Subriel Matias and challenger Dalton Smith. I think this fight embodies all of what we hope we will get more of in 2026.

We look for a number of things in a match that makes us count down the days to the first bell. We want an interesting journey to the match, high stakes for the winner and a fight that looks like it could be an all-action affair in the ring. And, let me throw in an additional enticement: While it is shown on a subscription platform, it is NOT a pay-per-view card. So it looks like the poster child of what boxing fans want more of in 2026.

1. **The Journey.** These fighters arrived at this match differently and find themselves at different points in their careers. For the 28-year-old Smith, this fight is his coming-out party on the world stage. The pride of Sheffield, England, has solid amateur credentials, then as a pro was unwavering in his march through the best that Europe can offer at 140 pounds – winning the British, Commonwealth and European titles. He has the potential to be a world champion and a force in this division and maybe others for at least a half decade or more. Matchroom Boxing has carefully guided his career and he has in return done his part by winning impressively. It has been a straight line from amateur champ to prospect to contender – and now, they hope, champion. Only the machinations of boxing governing bodies have slowed the process.

   For the 33-year-old Matias, the path to this fight has been anything but a straight line. He is on his second go-around as a world titleholder. The career of this Puerto Rican whirlwind has been filled with drama inside and outside the ring. He has dealt with the death of a fighter he beat in the ring (Maxim Dadashev), an upset loss to Liam Paro in a match that his new promoter, Matchroom Boxing, set up as a homecoming coronation. Even getting to his boxing career was a difficult route, involving criminal activities as a youth that led to his suffering a gunshot wound and serving a prison term. But boxing changed that, and he now is a husband with three daughters and is a world titleholder who despite these ups and downs has dazzled boxing fans with his exciting style.

2. **Smith's mission statement** in this fight is to show that he is THAT guy – the one that his steadfast promoter and legion of fans believe is destined to be a champion and one of Great Britain's shining lights on the boxing stage. He goes into this match, however, untested by upper-echelon fighters in his weight class. In a division loaded with talent, these opportunities for a title don't come easily. A loss could set him back significantly. Matias victims like Jeremias Ponce, Shohjahon Ergashev and Batyr Jukembayev never quite regained their top contender status after losing in dramatic fashion to Matias. No one, however, will ever suggest that Smith lacks self-belief. A career of success fuels that. So he feels the scenario that befell those other fighters is unlikely for him. He calls himself a "nightmare matchup" for Matias.

   Matias was considered the boogeyman of the 140-pound division after he won the vacant IBF title against Ponce and defended it against Ergashev in violent, thrilling fights in 2023. Then the upset loss to Paro burst that bubble. Even his WBC title-winning effort against Alberto Puello did not put to rest the idea that the boogeyman label was no longer appropriate. He gave us a glimpse of that "old" Matias in a win over talented contender Gabriel Valenzuela in a thrilling match earlier in 2025. If defending a world title is not enough of a motivation for Matias, there is also an important marketing goal. To enhance his status and improve his commerce in boxing, he wants and perhaps needs to produce a winning effort that harkens back to his exciting past. Some wonder if, at age 33, after some hellacious wars, he is still a feared 140-pounder.

3. **The Fight.** About 75% of the reason I chose to write about this match as opposed to others is simply the delicious nature of this matchup. Usually when you really, really, really think a match will be very good, it ends up being very good. Most people who know boxing really, really, really think this one will be very good.

   I have announced six of the last nine fights of Matias. I love announcing his matches because I usually know exactly what will happen and it allows me to be prepared. Yes, they are predictable, but in a wildly exciting way. First of all, he loses the first round – almost always. Oftentimes he loses the first round really badly. And sometimes, like in the Ponce and Ergashev fights, it looks like he might not make it to Round 2. But he always does. Then, in Round 2 or 3, no matter what kind of beating he took, he starts to take over the fight. Most fighters simply can't resist battering Matias in the first round, luring themselves into a slugfest, which is what he wants.

   The men who have done well against Matias have done so with guile more than strength. Paro's win and Puello's close decision loss were fashioned from not taking the bait early. They both won the first round easily but did so while boxing and starting to create an off-tempo, in-and-out approach in which standing in the pocket for an extended period was not part of the plan. If you stand and trade with Matias, you will lose – at least it has been so to this point in his career.

   Smith is a power-puncher to be sure, but he has a measured offense until he feels he has a fighter hurt. Then he takes more risks. Now, that alone does not mean he will have success against Matias, because often fighters think they have him hurt and yet he ends up taking them out when they take too many risks. Smith's previous work suggests he might have the discipline not to do that. The question will be whether Smith's mobility allows him to employ lateral movement and change angles enough to keep the always forward-charging Matias off-balance – while Smith is providing offense of his own.

   Here is where things get really interesting. It is likely at some point this fight will reach a place where Smith is forced to trade. He is not a holder or a runner or an awkward boxer who creates an off-rhythm fight. He is the definition of a boxer-puncher. He has never faced a pressure fighter like Matias, not to mention a fighter on Matias' level. He will at some point have do to battle. When that happens, and depending how long it happens for, we will get the answer to two questions. First, is Smith the one who can do what other talented and dangerous fighters have not been able to do – hurt Matias enough in a firefight to win the match? That is quite possible. If it happened it would be partially due to Smith's power and accuracy and partially due to the wear and tear on Matias from so many pitched battles. Second, should Smith have faced slightly better competition to prepare himself for this moment? Will the talent and power gulf between his previous opponents and Matias be too much?

   A couple of wild card strategy points: Smith often lunges in with his right hand, leaving himself open to a counter left hook. Matias has one of the best left hooks in boxing and can counter with it. Smith is such a good body puncher (as Jose Zepeda will attest to) that he could land something there against Matias that would materially change this fight. Perhaps my zeal for the Xs and Os of this fight come through to you. I hope so. This match is fascinating on many levels.

   Champions come and go quickly. Matias defended his IBF title once before losing it. He'll try to better that with the WBC strap – which actually qualifies as a long title reign at 140. Consider this recent history: The WBA 140-pound title was won by Rolly Romero on May 15, 2023. He lost it in his first defense to Isaac Cruz, who lost it in HIS first defense to Jose Valenzuela, who promptly lost it in his very next fight to Gary Antuanne Russell. When Matias lost his IBF title after one defense to Liam Paro, the Australian fighter turned around and lost it in his first defense to Richardson Hitchins.

   Given all that, it is best for everyone to simply concentrate on the moment on January 10. Whether a successful title defense is made or yet another crown changes hands, we will see two quality fighters face each other in an almost can't-miss battle. That is enough to give the first quarter of 2026 more than a fighting chance. RING

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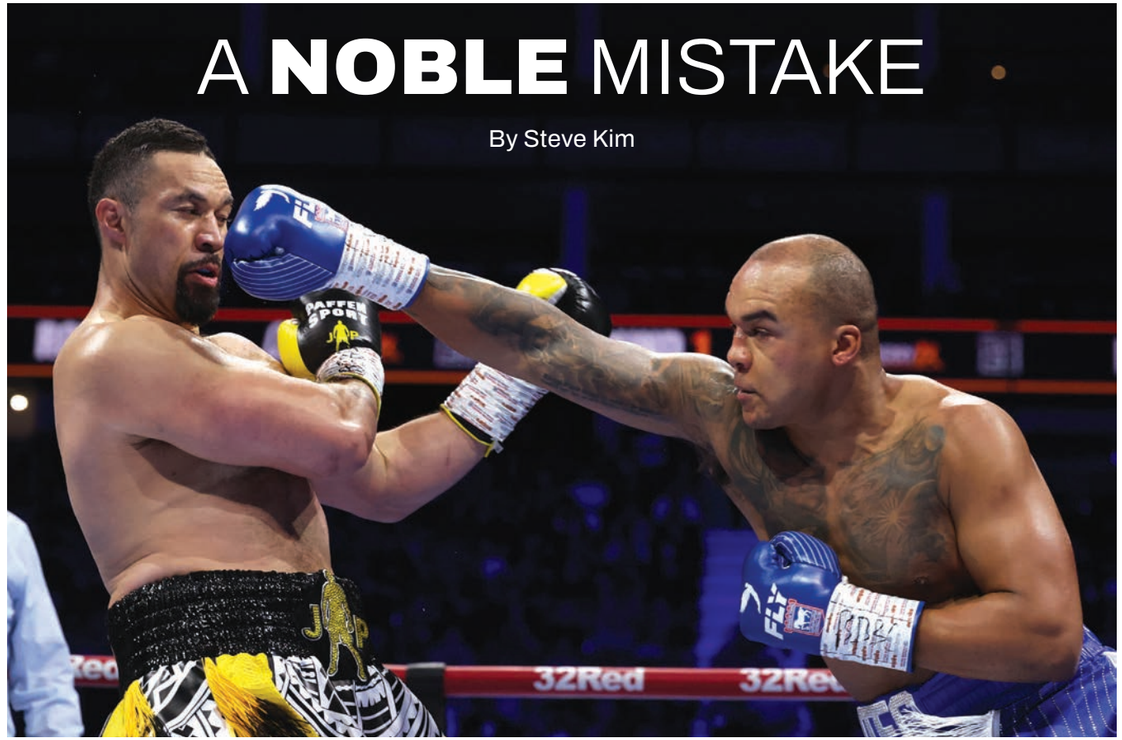
A **NOBLE** MISTAKE

By Steve Kim



In an upset, Fabio Wardley (right) came from behind to finish Joseph Parker.

Coming into his October 25 bout versus Fabio Wardley, Joseph Parker held the WBO interim heavyweight title (along with being rated second in the division by Ring Magazine). By virtue of his interim status, he was theoretically in line to face undisputed champion Oleksandr Usyk.

But those dreams were seemingly dashed after he was stopped in somewhat controversial fashion by the resilient Wardley in the 11th round.

Some have criticized Parker's decision to take this fight, especially against a dangerous up-and-comer like Wardley. If there's one thing the relatively inexperienced Wardley can do, it's bang. In his previous bout in June, he was down big against Australian Justis Huni, a highly touted prospect in his own right, before he brought out the eraser to score a dramatic 10th-round KO.

It says here that Parker was damned if he did and damned if he didn't.

It's not certain just where the 33-year-old Kiwi goes from here. My view is that Parker should be given credit for actually getting out there and fighting, and beyond that for actually taking a risk. In a sport where risk mitigation is 98% of the business, this was actually refreshing to see.

But it does leave you wondering: Was indiscretion the better part of valor?

Was Parker better off just waiting around for Usyk, or at least taking a far less dangerous foe? Yeah, he might have been involved in a 2025 Fight of the Year contender, but is that plaque worth as much as the payday he would've been in line to receive for facing Usyk?

But here's the kicker: Given Usyk's well-earned status, there really was no guarantee that Parker was ever going to get that bout. And now that Usyk has vacated the WBO strap (resulting in Wardley being upgraded to titleholder), he can just lean on his status as the Ring champion and target the biggest fight possible.

I choose to credit Parker for being a fighter.

What happened to him is nothing new. Back in 1993, Tommy Morrison was coming off a victory over George Foreman for the WBO belt (which at the time was not considered a major title at heavyweight). After a tune-up victory over Tim Tomashek, a deal was in place for "The Duke" to square off against respected WBC champ Lennox Lewis in the first quarter of 1994. All he had to do was get past the handpicked, supposedly light-hitting and "chinny" Michael Bentt.

"We had an $8 million deal to face Lennox Lewis – and it was done," Tony Holden, who worked in various capacities with Morrison throughout his career, told The Ring. "The problem was it was months down the road. You can't hold Tommy that long, because he

would self-destruct. Tommy was great in camp when it started. He worked hard, but when that was over and the boxing was over, that meant he had time on his hands.

"So that's when the Bentt fight came into play."

Back in that era, boxers were much more active. Morrison fought five times in 1993, after performing six times the previous year. By this stage of his career, he was no longer a developing prospect but a highly marketable heavyweight contender who was making significant money. But he was not beyond taking stay-busy bouts to keep himself sharp and, as Holden noted, out of trouble.

Bentt was known for having a solid amateur career but was thought to be a safe choice as cannon fodder for Morrison. Coming into that contest, Bentt's record was a rather pedestrian 10-1 (5 KOs). "I didn't pick Bentt, but I think the reason [for picking him] was Bentt had no power," Holden recalled.

Taking place in October 1993, the bout came just two months after the Tomashek fight. This was about keeping Morrison preoccupied before the Lewis showdown.

"Money had nothing to do with it – I mean, even though there was a good payday," said Holden, who now resides in Bali. "HBO picked it up. I put it in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Bob Arum was the promoter, but I set up the fights."

Morrison, like Mike Tyson, was managed by Bill Cayton, who, during his association as Tyson's co-manager alongside the late Jim Jacobs, believed that a busy boxer was one that stayed out of harm's way.

"[Cayton] never let anything go and never knew when to be cautious," recalled Arum, whose company featured Morrison a multitude of times on ESPN on his way up the ladder. "He asked us to do a fight for Tommy prior to him doing this big, big fight with Lennox Lewis."

While it was a tune-up bout, this was still part of a high-profile event that also featured James Toney vs. Tony Thornton in front of a sizable throng that came out to see Morrison.

Morrison's capitulation against Bentt cost him millions of dollars.

As the fight was being previewed by HBO, Larry Merchant said these rather ominous words to Jim Lampley: "[Lewis'] people can't understand why this fight is happening. After all, this is the year in which two heavyweights who had a chance to make big money in title fights, Ray Mercer and Alex Garcia, both lost to potential 'setups.'"

Mercer was upset by Jesse Ferguson with a title shot looming versus Riddick Bowe, while Garcia squandered his opportunity to face George Foreman by getting stopped in two by Mike Dixon.

"But Tommy Morrison himself wants this fight," continued Merchant. "I think he thinks he has to beat a fighter like this to prove to himself he can take on a boxer like Lennox Lewis. But there are a lot of nervous people here, and we've seen stranger things happen."

As the fight began, Morrison marched forward and immediately backed up Bentt along the ropes, where he buzzed him early on. But to his credit, Michael bent but he did not break.

It was a sharp right off the ropes that first stunned Morrison, eventually leading to the first knockdown. Morrison never truly recovered and he was sent down two more times. Referee Danny Campbell had no choice but to wave off the fight.

"I was completely stunned. It was a fight that we didn't want to do," stated Arum. "We vehemently opposed that fight taking place, because you never know. You had a huge payday – why jeopardize it? But Cayton was a 'genius.'"

Left to pick up the pieces was Holden. According to him, "Everybody left [Morrison]. It was just me and [trainer] Tom Vergets."

Instead of fighting for $8 million, Morrison's next bout was for $60,000 in Biloxi, Mississippi, with Tui Toia. But the truth of the matter is that Morrison was never quite the same guy. Regardless, his career marched forward.

"I learned to keep pushing on," said Holden. "And guess what? We ended up getting the Lennox Lewis fight."

Morrison would get halted in six rounds by Lewis in October 1995, but for significantly less money than originally planned. Again, credit to Parker for getting out there, but the reality is that all losses have consequences. RING

Richard Pelham

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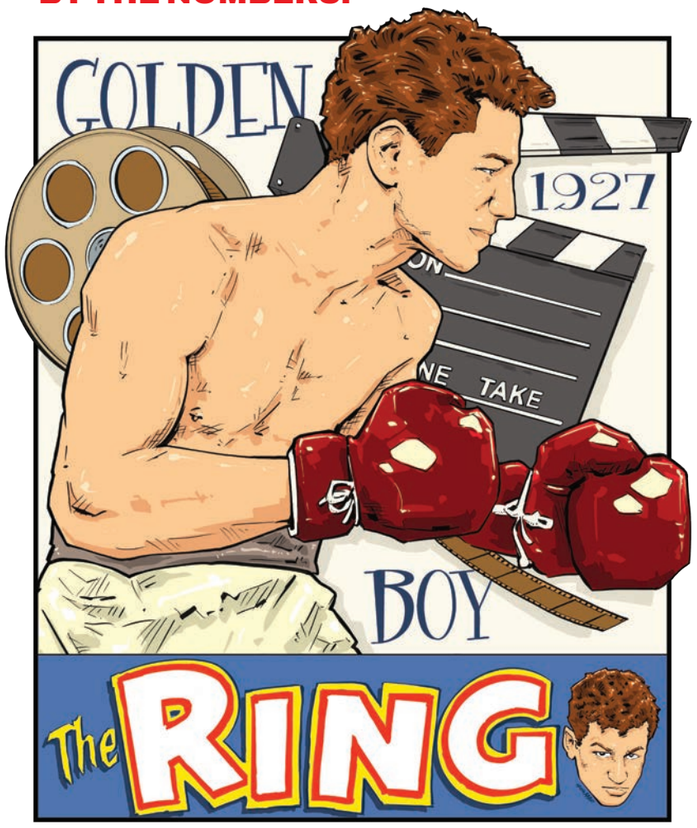

ART ARAGON

by Don Stradley • Illustration by KronkAAArt

“You ever get booed by 10,000 people? It’s exciting.” So said Art Aragon. And he would know, since few fighters have ever enjoyed irritating the customers as much as this free-swinging left-hooker who fought out of East Los Angeles. Aragon had the crowd-baiting instincts of a professional wrestler, complete with a closet full of gold-colored trunks and robes, and a bevy of beautiful women at his side. If you didn’t come to the arena to jeer Aragon, you’d certainly be doing it before the fight had ended. Get ready to boo, because here’s his story by the numbers.

116 total bouts »

Aragon was a typical busy fighter of the post-war years, compiling a record of 90-20-6 with 62 KOs. Along with a willingness to brawl, he possessed the sort of charisma that can’t be taught, earning the nickname “Golden Boy” long before Oscar De La Hoya’s time. Fighting almost exclusively in Los Angeles, having grown up there after moving from New Mexico, he became a staple of both the Legion Stadium in Hollywood and the Olympic Auditorium. An all-action lightweight and welterweight, Aragon scored wins against the likes of Lauro Salas, Chico Vejar, Teddy “Redtop” Davis, Enrique Bolanos (twice) and future titleholder Don Jordan (twice).

“He was so colorful,” boxing publicist Bill Caplan once said, “and his fights were so exciting. He was a kill-or-be-killed kind of guy.”

Yet Aragon’s hell-bent style, which made him the top draw in Los Angeles for many years, wasn’t enough against stylists such as Vince Martinez and Billy Graham, to whom he lost decisions. Aragon also suffered a bruising TKO loss to Carmen Basilio. That was the night the referee approached a bloody Aragon between rounds and said he was close to stopping the fight, to which Aragon responded, “What are you waiting for?”

3 fights with Jimmy Carter »

Nowadays, Aragon would probably win a title or two, but in his own time he received only one title shot and failed. Aragon’s 15-round decision loss to lightweight champion Jimmy Carter in 1951 earmarked him as a game if less than elite slugger. He’d earned the opportunity by beating Carter in a non-title bout earlier that year, but when the belt was on the line and the mercurial Carter was motivated, Aragon flopped.

Though Aragon was still standing at the finish, there was no doubt that Carter had won. The champ swept the scorecards, knocking Aragon down twice, cutting him badly around the eyes and smacking his mouthpiece out at least six times, including one moonshot that arced over the audience and landed in the sixth row. Aragon, it appeared, wasn’t championship material. Not at lightweight, anyway, where making weight was always a struggle for him. He once said, “I was the only fighter who had to be carried into the ring.”

They’d meet again as welterweights in 1956, when Carter was an ex-champion on a downward skid. Aragon won on points over 10 rounds, turning in what the Los Angeles Mirror called “one of the truly great performances of his sensational career.” Carter had been masterful when a title was at stake, but Aragon could take some comfort in leading their series 2-1.

1 controversial win over Chuck Davey »

Unfortunately, no television cameras were on hand at the Olympic to record the 1954 bout between Aragon and Davey. By most accounts, it was an excellent fight, with the boyish Davey boxing smartly and Aragon slamming away with only his right hand, having injured his left early in the bout. The crowd, already prone to hating Aragon, felt Davey was ahead by the end of 10 rounds. When the split decision was announced in Aragon’s favor, the 10,400 in attendance erupted in what one reporter called “a scene of pandemonium never before equaled at a local arena.”

The California Boxing Commission immediately suspended referee Mushy Callahan and ringside judge Joe Stone, both of whom scored the contest for Aragon. The L.A. Mirror, scholars in exaggeration, called Aragon’s win “the most disputed verdict in the history of California boxing.” In the same breath, the Mirror declared the “decision wasn’t that atrocious. It was a matter of differing between sporadic but convincing explosions and steady, sparkling science.”

Convinced his sporadic explosions had been enough to win, Aragon was unapologetic, claiming Davey did nothing but run all night. As for the post-fight commotion, Aragon was surprised. “But something always happens when I’m involved in the fight,” he said. “We make front-page headlines every time.”

The Mirror, by the way, had two writers on press row. One scored the bout a draw, the other saw it for Aragon. Meanwhile, the Valley Times had it for Davey by one point but added, “it was Art Aragon who made it. Without Aragon chasing Davey, it would’ve been a dull affair …”

4 fixed fight scandals »

Ugly accusations tarnished Aragon’s reputation. One involved Tommy Campbell, an Illinois lightweight who testified before a state probe that he was ordered to take a dive against Aragon in their 1950 bout. Before the same government committee, Carlos Chavez also claimed he purposely lost against Aragon when they’d fought that year, taking a 10-count on his knee in the first round. Chavez had beaten Aragon easily in a previous contest but claimed he was ill with hemorrhoids for the rematch and saw “no use in getting hurt.” Later, Chavez told the Long Beach Independent, “I’d bet that 30% of Aragon’s fights were fixed for him.”

It happens that 1950 was a time when Aragon was fighting a lot of “tomato cans” for L.A. promoter Babe McCoy, the focal point of the state’s investigation. Most reporters believed Aragon when he claimed to know nothing of any fixes. “It would be fair to accuse Aragon of mediocrity,” wrote Bob Panella of the L.A. Evening Citizen News, “but not dishonesty.”

Carter was also rumored to have not tried in his first bout with Aragon, under orders from a Mafia figure.

Aragon was later found guilty of fight-fixing charges in 1957, having allegedly bribed Dick Goldstein, an unranked fighter, to take a dive (though the bout itself was canceled on fight day). Aragon was sentenced to serve one to five years in prison. When Aragon successfully appealed, the charges were dropped.

32 years old when he retired »

Aragon’s last bout, fittingly, was at the Olympic in January of 1960. A new decade was dawning, and Aragon, who had started his career in 1944 at age 16, was done. The message was made abundantly clear when journeyman Alvaro Gutierrez stopped him in the ninth. The crowd, down a couple thousand from Aragon’s golden heyday, knew they were seeing him for the last time. Aragon announced his retirement in the hallway outside his dressing room. “I’m glad it’s over,” he said.

In his 16 years as a pro, Aragon had done enough for two men. To paraphrase L.A. sportswriter John Hall, Aragon may not have been a great fighter, but he’d acted like one. And everyone in the city went along for the trip. Even if they booed, there was always some affection behind it. He was the man they loved to hate.

In between bouts, there’d been small parts in movies and affairs with some of Tinseltown’s prettiest ladies, including B-movie bombshell Mamie Van Doren. There were also four marriages, a bunch of children and grandchildren, a conversion to Judaism and a longstanding gig as a bail bondsman in Van Nuys.

He would sometimes describe boxing as a miserable business that gave him brain damage, but he’d also tell you that he missed the money and the women and those unforgettable days when he’d owned the town. It had been an astounding life.

Aragon died at age 80 in 2008. According to legend, the gathering at his memorial service in the Hollywood Hills gave him a unique sendoff: They booed him one last time. He would’ve loved it.

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Ring Ratings Through fights of November 15, 2025

Benn remained disciplined against a drained Eubank Jr. in their rematch.

Justin Setterfield

Recent Fight Results

MEN

H: Fabio Wardley (No. 6, ▲4) TKO 11 Joseph Parker (No. 2, ▼2)
175: Joshua Buatsi (No. 5, ▼3) MD 10 Zach Parker
160: Conor Benn (in at No. 4) UD 12 Chris Eubank Jr. (No. 3, ▼6)
154: Vergil Ortiz (No. 1) KO 2 Erickson Lubin (No. 5, out)
147: Jack Catterall (in at No. 8) TKO 11 Ekow Essuman (No. 10, out)
147: Shakhram Giyasov (No. 5) TKO 4 Mark Urvanov
140: Lindolfo Delgado (No. 9) SD 12 Gabriel Gollaz
140: Adam Azim (No. 10, ▲2) TKO 12 Kurt Scoby
126: Rafael Espinoza (No. 1) TKO 10 Arnold Khegai
122: Luis Nery (No. 2) moved up
115: Andrew Moloney (No. 6) TKO 5 Pawan Kumar Arya
112: Tobias Reyes (No. 9) UD 10 Pedro Alarcon
108: Sivenathi Nontshinga (in at No. 10) KO 2 Sunday Kiwale
105: Pedro Taduran (No. 2) UD 12 Christian Balunan
105: Melvin Jerusalem (No. 1) UD 12 Siyakholwa Kuse (No. 4, ▼1)
105: Vic Saludar (No. 9) TKO 3 Suriya Puttaluksa

WOMEN

160: Desley Robinson (No. 1) TKO 2 Logan Holler
154: Cecelia Braekhus (No. 1) retired
154: Mikaela Mayer (in at No. 1) UD 10 Mary Spencer (No. 4)
118: Shuretta Metcalf (No. 3) UD 8 Krystal Rosado-Ortiz
108: Gabriela Alaniz (No. 3) UD 10 Laura Wollenmann
105: Sarah Bormann (No. 2) SD 10 Yuko Kuroki (No. 3)
102: Tina Rupprecht (C) retired
102: Sumire Yamanaka (No. 1) UD 8 Megumi Watanabe
102: Camila Zamorano (No. 4, ▲2) UD 10 Sana Hazuki

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Nov. 15, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	OLEKSANDR USYK ◆◆◆◆	Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
1	TYSON FURY	U.K. • 34-2-1 (24 KOs)
2	▲+4 FABIO WARDLEY ◆	U.K. • 20-0-1 (19 KOs)
3	AGIT KABAYEL	Germany • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
4	▼-2 JOSEPH PARKER	New Zealand • 36-4-0 (24 KOs)
5	DANIEL DUBOIS	U.K. • 22-3-0 (21 KOs)
6	FILIP HRGOVIC	Croatia • 19-1-0 (14 KOs)
7	ZHILEI ZHANG	China • 27-3-1 (22 KOs)
8	MARTIN BAKOLE	Congo • 21-2-1 (16 KOs)
9	MOSES ITAUMA	U.K. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)
10	EFE AJAGBA	Nigeria • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	JAI OPETAIA ◆◆	Australia • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
1	GILBERTO RAMIREZ ◆◆	Mexico • 48-1-0 (30 KOs)
2	CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH	U.K. • 21-2-0 (13 KOs)
3	MICHAL CIESLAK	Poland • 28-2-0 (22 KOs)
4	RYAN ROZICKI	Canada • 20-1-1 (19 KOs)
5	BADOU JACK ◆	Sweden • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)
6	NOEL MIKAELIAN	Armenia • 27-3-0 (12 KOs)
7	YAMIL PERALTA	Argentina • 17-1-1 (9 KOs)
8	LEONARDO MOSQUEA	France • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
9	ROBIN SIRWAN SAFAR	Sweden • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
10	VIDDAL RILEY	U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	DMITRY BIVOL ◆◆◆◆	Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
1	ARTUR BETERBIEV	Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
2	DAVID BENAVIDEZ ◆	U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
3	CALLUM SMITH	U.K. • 31-2-0 (22 KOs)
4	ANTHONY YARDE	U.K. • 27-3-0 (24 KOs)
5	▲+1 ALBERT RAMIREZ	Venezuela • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
6	▲+1 DAVID MORRELL	Cuba • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
7	▲+1 IMAM KHATAEV	Australia • 10-1-0 (9 KOs)
8	▼-3 JOSHUA BUATSI	U.K. • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
9	OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK	Ukraine • 21-2-0 (17 KOs)
10	WILLY HUTCHINSON	U.K. • 19-2-0 (14 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	TERENCE CRAWFORD ◆◆◆◆◆	U.S. • 42-0-0 (31 KOs)
1	CANELO ALVAREZ	Mexico • 63-3-2 (39 KOs)
2	OSLEYS IGLESIAS	Cuba • 14-0-0 (13 KOs)
3	CHRISTIAN MBILLI	France • 29-0-1 (24 KOs)
4	LESTER MARTINEZ	Guatemala • 19-0-1 (16 KOs)
5	DIEGO PACHECO	U.S. • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)
6	JOSE ARMANDO RESENDIZ	Mexico • 16-2-0 (11 KOs)
7	CALEB PLANT	U.S. • 23-3-0 (14 KOs)
8	HAMZAH SHEERAZ	U.K. • 22-0-1 (18 KOs)
9	BRUNO SURACE	France • 26-1-2 (5 KOs)
10	WILLIAM SCULL	Cuba • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY ◆◆	Kazakhstan • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
2	CARLOS ADAMES ◆	Dom. Rep. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
3	▲+1 YOENLI HERNANDEZ	Cuba • 9-0-0 (8 KOs)
4	★ CONOR BENN	U.K. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)
5	TROY ISLEY	U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)
6	ETINOSA OLIHA	Italy • 22-0-0 (10 KOs)
7	AARON MCKENNA	Ireland • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
8	AUSTIN WILLIAMS	U.S. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
9	▼-6 CHRIS EUBANK JR.	U.K. • 35-4-0 (25 KOs)
10	▼-1 DENZEL BENTLEY	U.K. • 21-3-1 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	VERGIL ORTIZ	U.S. • 24-0-0 (22 KOs)
2	SEBASTIAN FUNDORA ◆	U.S. • 23-1-1 (15 KOs)
3	ISRAIL MADRIMOV	Uzbekistan • 10-2-1 (7 KOs)
4	BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV ◆	Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
5	▲+1 XANDER ZAYAS ◆	Puerto Rico • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
6	▲+1 JARON ENNIS	U.S. • 35-0-0 (31 KOs)
7	▲+1 BRANDON ADAMS	U.S. • 26-4-0 (16 KOs)
8	▲+1 JESUS RAMOS	U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
9	▼-1 ABASS BARAOU ◆	Germany • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
10	★ SERHII BOHACHUK	Ukraine • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	BRIAN NORMAN JR. ◆	U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
2	EIMANTAS STANIONIS	Lithuania • 16-1-0 (9 KOs)
3	GIOVANI SANTILLAN	U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
4	ROHAN POLANCO	Dom. Rep. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
5	SHAKHRAM GIYASOV	Uzbekistan • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
6	ALEXIS ROCHA	U.S. • 25-2-1 (16 KOs)
7	RAUL CURIEL	Mexico • 16-0-1 (14 KOs)
8	★ JACK CATTERALL	U.K. • 32-2-0 (14 KOs)
9	▼-1 MARIO BARRIOS ◆	U.S. • 29-2-2 (18 KOs)
10	▼-1 MANNY PACQUIAO	Philippines • 62-8-3 (39 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C	TEOFIMO LOPEZ ◆◆	U.S. • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)
1	RICHARDSON HITCHINS ◆	U.S. • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)
2	SUBRIEL MATIAS ◆	Puerto Rico • 23-2-0 (22 KOs)
3	ALBERTO PUELLO	Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (10 KOs)
4	ARNOLD BARBOZA	U.S. • 32-1-0 (11 KOs)
5	GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL ◆	U.S. • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
6	SANDOR MARTIN	Spain • 42-4-0 (15 KOs)
7	DALTON SMITH	U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
8	▲+2 ADAM AZIM	U.K. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
9	LINDOLFO DELGADO	Mexico • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
10	▼-2 ANDY HIRAOKA	Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)

MEN'S RING RATINGS Through Nov. 15, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**SHAKUR STEVENSON** ◆	U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)
2	**GERVONTA DAVIS** ◆	U.S. • 30-0-1 (28 KOs)
3	**RAYMOND MURATALLA** ◆	U.S. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
4	**WILLIAM ZEPEDA**	Mexico • 33-1-0 (27 KOs)
5	**ANDY CRUZ**	Cuba • 6-0-0 (3 KOs)
6	**FLOYD SCHOFIELD**	U.S. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
7	**DENYS BERINCHYK**	Ukraine • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
8	**SAM NOAKES**	U.K. • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)
9	**ABDULLAH MASON**	U.S. • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)
10	**LUCAS BAHDI**	Canada • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**O'SHAQUIE FOSTER** ◆	U.S. • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
2	**EMANUEL NAVARRETE** ◆	Mexico • 39-2-1 (32 KOs)
3	**ANTHONY CACACE**	Ireland • 24-1-0 (9 KOs)
4	**LAMONT ROACH** ◆	U.S. • 25-1-2 (10 KOs)
5	**EDUARDO NUNEZ** ◆	Mexico • 29-1-0 (27 KOs)
6	**ROBSON CONCEICAO**	Brazil • 20-3-1 (10 KOs)
7	**EDUARDO HERNANDEZ**	Mexico • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
8	**CHARLY SUAREZ**	Philippines • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
9	**RAYMOND FORD**	U.S. • 18-1-1 (8 KOs)
10	**JAMES DICKENS**	U.K. • 36-5-0 (15 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**RAFAEL ESPINOZA** ◆	Mexico • 28-0-0 (24 KOs)
2	**ANGELO LEO** ◆	U.S. • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
3	**NICK BALL** ◆	U.K. • 23-0-1 (13 KOs)
4	**STEPHEN FULTON** ◆	U.S. • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)
5	**LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ**	Mexico • 31-3-0 (18 KOs)
6	**BRUCE CARRINGTON**	U.S. • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
7	**BRANDON FIGUEROA**	U.S. • 26-2-1 (19 KOs)
8	**MIRCO CUELLO**	Argentina • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
9	**ROBEISY RAMIREZ**	Cuba • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
10	**NATHANIEL COLLINS**	U.K. • 17-0-1 (8 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C	**NAOYA INOUE** ◆◆◆◆	Japan • 31-0-0 (27 KOs)
1	**MARLON TAPALES**	Philippines • 41-4-0 (22 KOs)
2	▲+1 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**	Uzbekistan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)
3	▲+1 **SAM GOODMAN**	Australia • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	▲+1 **ALAN PICASSO**	Mexico • 32-0-1 (17 KOs)
5	▲+1 **SHABAZ MASOUD**	U.K. • 14-0-0 (4 KOs)
6	▲+1 **TJ DOHENY**	Ireland • 26-6-0 (20 KOs)
7	▲+1 **RAMON CARDENAS**	U.S. • 26-2-0 (14 KOs)
8	▲+1 **SEBASTIAN HERNANDEZ**	Mexico • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)
9	▲+1 **SUBARU MURATA**	Japan • 10-0-0 (10 KOs)
10	★ **BRYAN MERCADO**	Mexico • 32-1-0 (26 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**SEIYA TSUTSUMI**	Japan • 12-0-3 (8 KOs)
2	**CHRISTIAN MEDINA** ◆	Mexico • 26-4-0 (19 KOs)
3	**RYOSUKE NISHIDA**	Japan • 10-1-0 (2 KOs)
4	**TAKUMA INOUE**	Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
5	**DAIGO HIGA**	Japan • 21-3-3 (19 KOs)
6	**ANTONIO VARGAS** ◆	U.S. • 19-1-1 (11 KOs)
7	**YOSHIKI TAKEI**	Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
8	**TENSHIN NASUKAWA**	Japan • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
9	**JASON MOLONEY**	Australia • 27-4-0 (19 KOs)
10	**JEYVIER CINTRON**	Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C	**JESSE RODRIGUEZ** ◆◆◆	U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
1	**FERNANDO MARTINEZ** ◆	Argentina • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)
2	**KAZUTO IOKA**	Japan • 31-4-1 (16 KOs)
3	**CARLOS CUADRAS**	Mexico • 44-5-1 (28 KOs)
4	**DAVID JIMENEZ**	Costa Rica • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
5	**PHUMELELE CAFU**	S. Africa • 11-1-3 (8 KOs)
6	**ANDREW MOLONEY**	Australia • 28-4-0 (18 KOs)
7	**RICARDO MALAJIKA**	S. Africa • 16-2-0 (12 KOs)
8	**WILLIBALDO GARCIA** ◆	Mexico • 23-6-2 (13 KOs)
9	**RENE CALIXTO BIBIANO**	Mexico • 23-1-1 (9 KOs)
10	**JAYR RAQUINEL**	Philippines • 18-2-1 (14 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**RICARDO SANDOVAL** ◆◆	U.S. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
2	**KENSHIRO TERAJI**	Japan • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)
3	**SEIGO YURI AKUI**	Japan • 21-3-1 (11 KOs)
4	**MASAMICHI YABUKI** ◆	Japan • 18-4-0 (17 KOs)
5	**GALAL YAFAI**	U.K. • 9-1-0 (7 KOs)
6	**ANTHONY OLASCUAGA** ◆	U.S. • 10-1-0 (7 KOs)
7	**ANGEL AYALA**	Mexico • 18-1-0 (8 KOs)
8	**FELIX ALVARADO**	Nicaragua • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
9	**TOBIAS REYES**	Argentina • 18-1-1 (16 KOs)
10	**JUKIYA IIMURA**	Japan • 9-1-0 (2 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C	(VACANT)	
1	**CARLOS CANIZALES** ◆	Venezuela • 28-3-1 (20 KOs)
2	**KYOSUKE TAKAMI** ◆	Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
3	**RENE SANTIAGO** ◆	Puerto Rico • 14-4-0 (9 KOs)
4	**THANONGSAK SIMSRI** ◆	Thailand • 39-1-0 (34 KOs)
5	**SHOKICHI IWATA**	Japan • 15-2-0 (2 KOs)
6	**REGIE SUGANOB**	Philippines • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
7	**CRISTIAN ARANETA**	Philippines • 25-3-0 (20 KOs)
8	**ERIK BADILLO**	Mexico • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)
9	**MASATAKA TANIGUCHI**	Japan • 21-5-0 (15 KOs)
10	★ **SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA**	S. Africa • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **OSCAR COLLAZO** ◆◆◆
U.S. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

1 **MELVIN JERUSALEM** ◆
Philippines • 25-3-0 (12 KOs)

2 **PEDRO TADURAN** ◆
Philippines • 19-4-1 (13 KOs)

3 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
Thailand • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)

4 ▲+1 **RYUSEI MATSUMOTO**
Japan • 7-0-0 (4 KOs)

5 ▼-1 **SIYAKHOLWA KUSE**
S. Africa • 9-3-1 (4 KOs)

6 **JOEY CANOY**
Philippines • 24-5-2 (15 KOs)

7 **TAKESHI ISHII**
Japan • 11-1-0 (8 KOs)

8 **YUNI TAKADA**
Japan • 16-9-3 (6 KOs)

9 **VIC SALUDAR**
Philippines • 27-6-0 (17 KOs)

10 **BEAVEN SIBANDA**
Zimbabwe • 9-1-0 (3 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose their belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which they are champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at their championship weight for 18 months (even if they fight at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

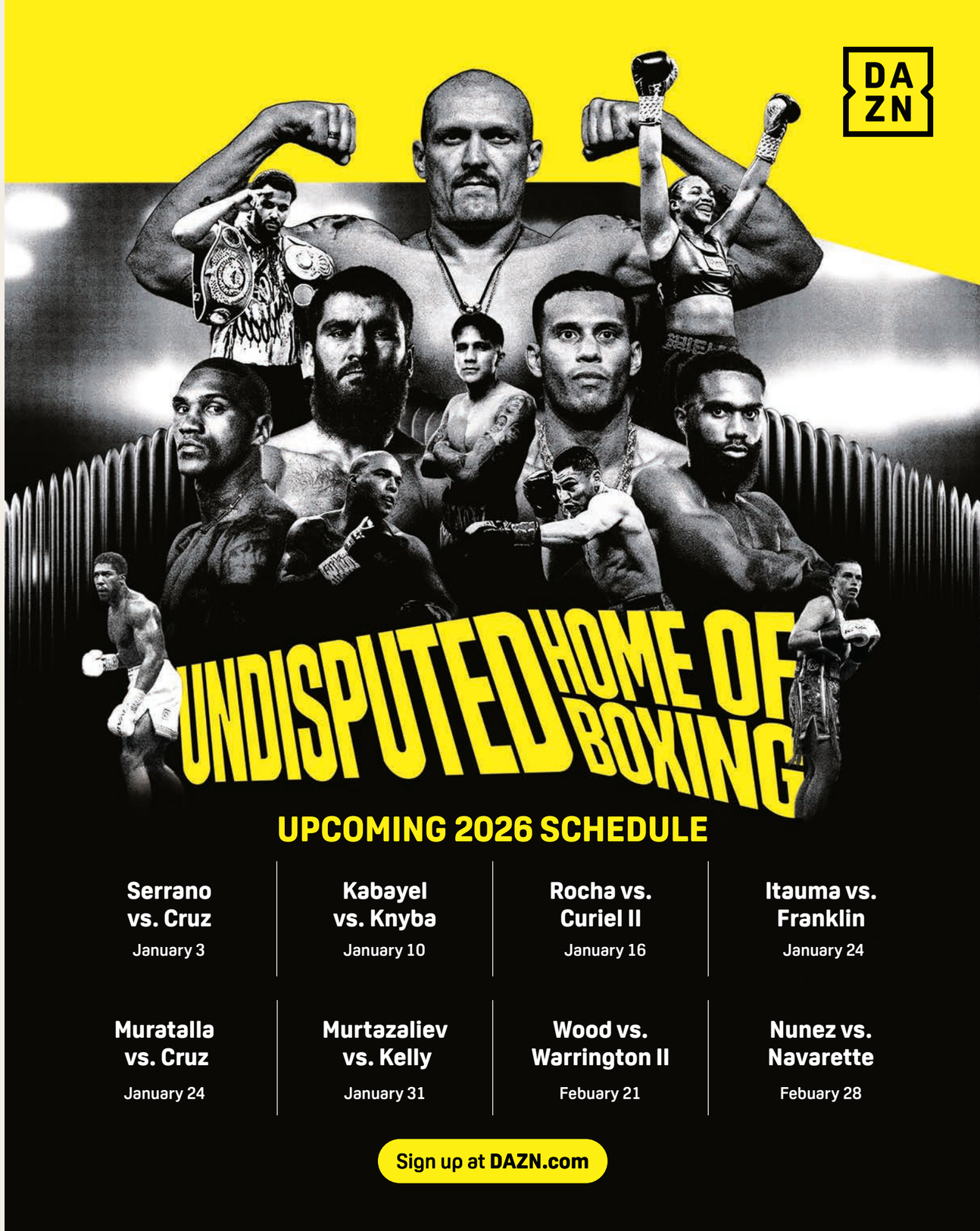
MEN

1	**TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 42-0-0 (31 KOs)
2	**OLEKSANDR USYK** Ukraine • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
3	**NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 31-0-0 (27 KOs)
4	**DMITRY BIVOL** Russia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)
5	**ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 21-1-0 (20 KOs)
6	**JESSE RODRIGUEZ** U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
7	**JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 31-0-0 (24 KOs)
8	**SHAKUR STEVENSON** U.S. • 24-0-0 (11 KOs)
9	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ** U.S. • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
10	**CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 63-3-2 (39 KOs)

Terence Crawford sits atop a very competitive list.

WOMEN

1	**KATIE TAYLOR** Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)
2	**CLARESSA SHIELDS** U.S. • 17-0-0 (3 KOs)
3	**MIKAELA MAYER** U.S. • 22-2-0 (5 KOs)
4	**CHANTELLE CAMERON** U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)
5	**AMANDA SERRANO** Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
6	**DINA THORSLUND** Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
7	**GABRIELA FUNDORA** U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
8	**LAUREN PRICE** U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)
9	**YOKASTA VALLE** Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
10	**TINA RUPPRECHT** Germany • 15-1-1 (3 KOs)



WOMEN'S RING RATINGS Through Nov. 15, 2025

CHAMPIONSHIP BELTS: ◆ RING ◆ IBF ◆ WBA ◆ WBC ◆ WBO | ★ NEW TO RATINGS

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C SHADASIA GREEN ◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)
1 FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN ◆◆
U.S. • 10-2-0 (2 KOs)
2 SAVANNAH MARSHALL
U.K. • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
3 LANI DANIELS
New Zealand • 11-3-2 (1 KO)
4 MARY CASAMASSA
U.S. • 6-1-0 (1 KO)
5 CITLALLI ORTIZ
Mexico • 4-2-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 DESLEY ROBINSON ◆◆
Australia • 11-3-0 (3 KOs)
2 MELINDA WATPOOL
Canada • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 TAMM THIBEAULT
Canada • 4-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 MAPULE NGUBANE
S. Africa • 14-9-3 (3 KOs)
5 ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO
Brazil • 6-3-0 (1 KO)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C. (VACANT)
1 ★ MIKAELA MAYER ◆◆◆
U.S. • 22-2-0 (5 KOs)
2 OSHAE JONES ◆
U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 FEMKE HERMANS
Belgium • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)
4 MARY SPENCER
Canada • 10-3-0 (6 KOs)
5 PRISCILLA PETERLE
France • 11-0-0 (3 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C LAUREN PRICE ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 9-0-0 (2 KO)
1 MIKAELA MAYER ◆
U.S. • 22-2-0 (5 KOs)
2 SANDY RYAN
U.K. • 8-3-1 (3 KOs)
3 NATASHA JONAS
U.K. • 16-3-1 (9 KOs)
4 STEPHANIE AQUINO
Puerto Rico • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)
5 MICHAELA KOTASKOVA
Czech Rep. • 11-0-2 (4 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C KATIE TAYLOR ◆◆◆◆
Ireland • 25-1-0 (6 KOs)
1 CHANTELLE CAMERON ◆
U.K. • 21-1-0 (8 KOs)
2 AMANDA SERRANO
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
3 SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON
U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 FLORA PILI
France • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
5 ELIZABETH OSHOBA
Nigeria • 9-0-0 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C. (VACANT)
1 CAROLINE DUBOIS ◆
U.K. • 11-0-1 (5 KOs)
2 BEATRIZ FERREIRA ◆
Brazil • 8-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 TERRI HARPER ◆
U.K. • 16-2-2 (6 KOs)
4 RHIANNON DIXON
U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
5 HOLLY HOLM
U.S. • 34-2-3 (9 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER ◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 16-1-0 (7 KOs)
1 LEILA BEAUDOIN
Canada • 13-1-0 (2 KOs)
2 DELFINE PERSOON
Belgium • 50-3-0 (20 KOs)
3 JENNIFER MIRANDA
Spain • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
4 MEA MOTU
New Zealand • 23-1-0 (10 KOs)
5 ELIF NUR TURHAN
Turkiye • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C AMANDA SERRANO ◆◆◆
Puerto Rico • 47-4-1 (31 KOs)
1 TIARA BROWN ◆
U.S. • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 NINA MEINKE ◆
German • 20-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 SKYE NICOLSON
Australia • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
4 SARAH MAHFOUD
Denmark • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 DANIELA BERMUDEZ
Argentina • 32-6-3 (12 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C ELLIE SCOTNEY ◆◆◆◆
U.K. • 11-0-0 (0 KOs)
1 YAMILETH MERCADO
Mexico • 24-4-0 (5 KOs)
2 SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE
France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
3 MAYELLI FLORES ROSQUERO ◆
Mexico • 13-1-1 (4 KOs)
4 ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ
Mexico • 18-2-1 (4 KOs)
5 NAZARENA ROMERO
Argentina • 14-1-2 (8 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C DINA THORSLUND ◆
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 CHERNEKA JOHNSON ◆◆◆◆
Australia • 18-2-0 (8 KOs)
2 DIANA LAURA FERNANDEZ
Mexico • 35-4-1 (5 KOs)
3 SHURRETTA METCALF
U.S. • 14-5-1 (2 KOs)
4 FLORENCIA JUAREZ
Argentina • 13-1-0 (1 KO)
5 AMANDA GALLE
Canada • 12-0-1 (1 KO)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C MIZUKI HIRUTA ◆◆
Japan • 9-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 GINNY FUCHS
U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
2 ADELAIDA RUIZ
U.S. • 17-1-1 (8 KOs)
3 ASLEY GONZALEZ ◆
Mexico • 17-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 CARLA MERINO
Argentina • 16-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 EMMA DOLAN
U.K. • 8-0-0 (1 KO)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C GABRIELA FUNDORA ◆◆◆◆◆
U.S. • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 KENIA ENRIQUEZ
Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
2 ARELY MUCINO
Mexico • 32-5-2 (11 KOs)
3 JASMINA ZAPOTOCZNA
U.K. • 10-1-0 (0 KOs)
4 MARILYN BADILLO AMAYA
Mexico • 19-1-1 (3 KOs)
5 ADRIANA THALIA PINEIRO
Uruguay • 9-0-0 (1 KO)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 EVELIN BERMUDEZ ◆◆◆
Argentina • 22-1-1 (8 KOs)
2 LOURDES JUAREZ ◆
Mexico • 39-4-0 (5 KOs)
3 GABRIELA ALANIZ
Argentina • 17-2-0 (7 KOS)
4 YESICA NERY PLATA
Mexico • 30-3-0 (3 KOs)
5 SARA BAILEY
Canada • 6-1-0 (0 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 YOKASTA VALLE ◆
Costa Rica • 33-3-0 (10 KOs)
2 SARAH BORMANN ◆
Germany • 21-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 YUKO KUROKI ◆
Japan • 25-9-2 (10 KOs)
4 KIM CLAVEL ◆
Canada • 22-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 SOL CUDOS
Argentina • 10-1-2 (3 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 SUMIRE YAMANAKA
Japan • 9-1-0 (3 KOs)
2 ▲+2 **CAMILA ZAMORANO**
Mexico • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
3 ▼-1 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 8-2-1 (1 KO)
4 ▼-1 **ESNEIDY RODRIGUEZ OLMOS**
Mexico • 11-0-1 (1 KO)
5 NAO UGAWA
Japan • 6-0-0 (0 KOs)

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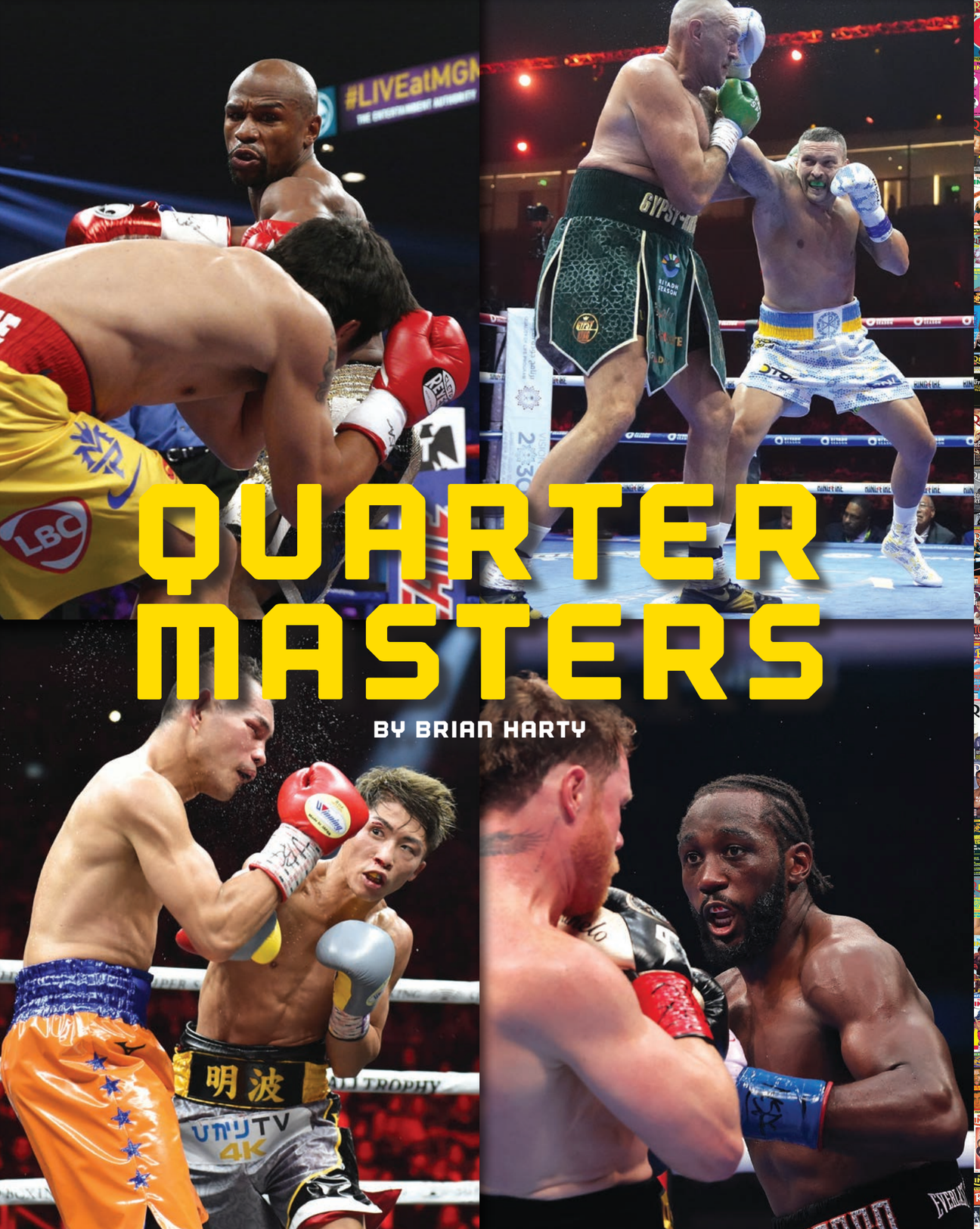


QUARTER MASTERS

BY BRIAN HARTY

THE FIRST 25 YEARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY HAVE SEEN THE RISE (AND SOMETIMES FALL) OF MANY ICONIC FIGHTERS

The world was supposed to end 26 years ago. In a Cinderella story from hell, every machine from microwave ovens to nuclear reactors was going to turn into a brick at the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999, leaving Earth's people to wake up amid blank screens and declined credit cards – a total collapse of digital infrastructure, all because of an early programming blunder called the Y2K bug. But aside from widespread Armageddon-prep buyer's remorse, maybe a few more hangovers than usual and the occasional electronic calendar showing the date as January 1, 1900, it was just another New Year's Day.

Boxing was also supposed to be facing oblivion as the 20th century neared its end. The Julio Cesar Chavez era was fading into the distance. Where Mike Tyson had once stood, only a puddle remained. Superstars of the '90s like Oscar De La Hoya, Felix Trinidad and Roy Jones Jr. were either looking down from or a bit past their peaks. The heavyweight division was going to suck without Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield. Nobody would shine in the eyes of purists like Pernell Whitaker and Ricardo Lopez had. At best, boxing wouldn't be what it used to be, and at worst it was toast.

But it seems like boxing is having a Y2K moment every other month. In *Self Defence; or, The Art of Boxing*, Ned Donnelly wrote: "As it is, the school of boxing is rapidly dying out, and when the professors of the present day have passed away it will be hard to say where the new ones are to come from." That was in 1879.

Donnelly needn't have gotten his mustache in a twist. John L. Sullivan was still a few years away from becoming the heavyweight champion. Jack Johnson had just been born. Jack Dempsey's birth was still 16 years in the future, and the world would wait another 26 years after that to welcome Walker Smith Jr., aka Sugar Ray Robinson. The Ring Magazine hatched the year after little Ray did.

The 20th century was very good for boxing (and vice versa), but it's history now. Several new professors *have* emerged in the new millennium, and the talk now isn't so much about boxing dying as it is about what boxing will become.

What follows are the 10 best male boxers of the 21st century so far. It's a pound-for-pound list, which itself is something that has risen to define boxing in recent years, somehow existing in the space between magical thinking and the most important real-world metric for determining a fighter's value. As such, would-be analysts weigh their criteria in different proportions – results and accomplishments are king, of course, but some value "the eye test" more than others. Measurable quantities like win percentages and the number of divisions traversed and conquered must be considered alongside physical attributes like speed and power, the full range of boxing skills and intangibles like intelligence, creativity and the metallic content of one's chin. Finally, in order to put a rating on the quality of a fighter's opposition, all of those questions must again be asked about the people they fought. It's an arbitrarily scientific equation about everything except boxing's most fundamental structure: divisions. After narrowing the field down to some top contenders, then it's just a battle royale in wonderland to pick a winner.

To do that, we polled members of the Ring Ratings panel, compiled individual Top 10 lists and assigned scores based on the fighters' positions in each one. Those scores were then added up to build the final list.

Keep in mind, this is a list that ranks fighters who have defined the past 25 years, and that's how panelists were asked to make their picks. There are pound-for-pound kings of the past, like De La Hoya and Jones, who fought into the new century but are rooted in the previous one, so you won't see their names here (Jones did get a lot of votes, however). Others who do fit the time frame garnered votes from the panel but just missed the cut. The notables, in the descending order of their vote tallies, include Juan Manuel Marquez, Jones, Wladimir Klitschko, Gennadiy Golovkin, Joe Calzaghe and Nonito Donaire. »

#10

CANELO ALVAREZ

63-3-2 (39 KOs), 2005-present
Titles held: Junior middleweight (Ring, WBA, WBC, WBO); Middleweight (Ring, IBF, WBA, WBC); Super middleweight (undisputed); Light heavyweight (WBO)

Though neither a mage-level boxer nor a cannon-fisted KO artist, the theme in Canelo's early career, seen through the king-making lens of HBO, was that we were witnessing a rising young star with plenty of power who was aggressive – particularly dangerous with combinations featuring shots to the body – and cerebral enough to learn from a crafty veteran like Shane Mosley or a prime contender like Austin Trout, the latter of whom he outpointed to win a Ring championship at junior middleweight. His rise to stardom hit a speed bump in Floyd Mayweather Jr., who relieved the 23-year-old Canelo of his belts and unbeaten record (42-0-1 going in) with a majority decision that should've been unanimous in 2013.

But learn he did. As a quasi-middleweight, Alvarez won his second championship with a decision over Miguel Cotto, then roamed between 154 and 175 pounds picking up titles before settling at super middleweight, where he ruled the division, eventually as undisputed champion, for four years until running into Terence Crawford. His career has been plagued by criticism about cherry-picking opponents and imposing catchweights, and the trilogy with Gennadiy Golovkin will always be "Exhibit A" for his detractors, but Canelo's non-controversial accomplishments are numerous.

His combos have given way to more of a stalking-and-thumping approach in recent times, but Alvarez remains an exceptionally well-rounded fighter who is able to write the narrative of a fight with intelligent pressure, good defensive movement and counterpunching, an array of weapons and a teflon chin (he has never been knocked down in his 68 fights). All of it has served him well in becoming "the face of boxing" for the past decade.

Canelo had too much of everything for former champ Jermell Charlo.

#9

ANDRE WARD

32-0 (16 KOs), 2004-2017
Titles held: Super middleweight (Ring, WBA, WBC); Light heavyweight (Ring, IBF, WBA, WBO)

Ward is not the kind of fighter you'd pull up on YouTube to get a friend interested in boxing, and that's not a knock on him. He's the kind of fighter your grateful friend will pull up on YouTube by themself after a couple years of learning about what boxers do.

Ward was always the steadiest, most fundamentally sound boxer in the ring. Great jab, great defense, great conditioning, a wide range of punches and completely unflappable – his expression didn't change much between when he entered the arena and when he left it with whatever world title he'd just won or defended. And one word followed him throughout his undefeated career: intelligence. Ward was a chess player who lived to figure his opponents out and shut them down with superior craft, not power.

He won the light heavyweight gold medal at the 2004 Olympics, turned pro later that year and was under the radar until the 168-pound Super Six World Boxing Classic kicked off in 2009. Starting with a technical decision over Mikkel Kessler for his first world title and ending with a unanimous decision over Carl Froch to become the unified Ring champion, Ward's four victories in the tournament were proof-positive of his talents on a worldwide stage. He made two defenses, against Chad Dawson and undefeated prospect Edwin Rodriguez, before moving up to 175 pounds. His last two fights were controversial wins over previously undefeated power-puncher Sergey Kovalev, but Ward left the sport as a unified Ring champion at light heavyweight. Unfortunately, it takes a *Queen's Gambit*-style dramatization to make chess interesting to a layperson, so Ward's style never really clicked with the mainstream.

Ward came from behind to outpoint Sergey Kovalev in their first fight.

#8

VASILIY LOMACHENKO

18-3 (12 KOs), 2013-2025
Titles held: Featherweight (WBO); Junior lightweight (WBO); Lightweight (Ring, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO)

Even with two Olympic gold medals and an unfathomable amateur record of 396-1, Lomachenko's shot at a world title in just his second pro fight seemed unnecessarily audacious to some, even arrogant. Mexican veteran Orlando Salido apparently agreed, showing how much he cared about Loma's amateur record by not making weight and roughing up the Ukrainian for 12 rounds to win a split decision.

But true to form, with his rude introduction to the pros complete, Lomachenko processed the information and adapted. He picked up the vacant WBO featherweight title in his next fight by handing the lightning-quick Gary Russell Jr. his first loss. In the second and third of three successful defenses, his opponents got knocked down and willingly took a 10 count rather than reenter a hopeless situation. Lomachenko then moved up to 130 pounds and won the WBO belt with a highlight-reel knockout of three-time titleholder Roman Martinez. His next four opponents, overwhelmed, gave up in their corners. Let that sink in. They included Cuban maestro Guillermo Rigondeaux, who was undefeated and ranked No. 4 pound-for-pound at the time.

It was during this time that Lomachenko did indeed seem like "The One," with upper-body movement that left opponents punching through vapors, footwork that bordered on teleportation and fluid combinations that were more like conjurations in the way they blended exotic angles with unpredictable speeds to do everything from distract to flatten opponents with surgical precision. Each fight was a high-speed vivisection. At lightweight, he was floored by the extremely gifted Jorge Linares but surged back and eventually overwhelmed the Venezuelan to become a three-division titleholder. Now retired, Lomachenko at his best was a wonder to behold.

Loma finds the target against lightweight contender Jamaine Ortiz.

Hopkins blasts out Tito Trinidad at Madison Square Garden.

#7

BERNARD HOPKINS

55-8-2 (32 KOs), 1988-2016
Titles held: Middleweight (undisputed); Light heavyweight (Ring, IBF, WBA, WBC)

Thinking Hopkins was going to turn into some kind of grandfatherly relic puttering around the ring was an error made over and over by journalists and opponents alike, a mistake on the level of thinking that velociraptors would make cute museum exhibits in *Jurassic Park*. "The Executioner" had his first pro fight two years before Canelo was even born and was already 36-2-1 when the century rolled over. Incredibly, though, his major accomplishments took place after 1999, making him a fully legal addition to this list. Always the enigma, he was voted as high as No. 3 by one panelist but was completely unranked in three of the top 10s submitted, which will cause disagreement but is somehow appropriate, given how fond B-Hop is of psychological warfare.

Hopkins' first shot at the IBF middleweight title was thwarted by Roy Jones Jr. in 1993, but he captured it two years later, at the age of 30, in a rematch with Segundo Mercado. He defended it 10 times (including a no-contest against Robert Allen) before the year 2000 – already an epic run for any fighter – but he was just getting started. There would be 10 more successful defenses, during which he also picked up the Ring, WBA, WBC and WBO titles, completing the collection against none other than future business partner De La Hoya. That win was preceded by victories over Trinidad (Tito's first loss) and former titleholder William Joppy. The reign came to an end against Jermain Taylor in 2005, but the now-41-year-old Hopkins bounced back a year later, beating Antonio Tarver to become the Ring light heavyweight champion. After losing the belt to Joe Calzaghe, he won it again by beating Jean Pascal at the age of 46. After losing it to Dawson, he beat Tavoris Cloud to win another world title at the age of 48. All of those losses were decisions, by the way, most of them extremely narrow. The only time Hopkins was stopped was in his final fight, at 51 years old, by Joe Smith Jr.

Hopkins has always taken extremely good care of himself, obviously, but he was also a quick-fisted and supremely crafty (sometimes a little dirty) defensive wizard who could almost always find a way to nullify his opponents' strengths. And again, when it came to ring IQ and understanding the art of war, he had no rivals. It would be tempting to say that he has forgotten more about boxing than most fighters know, but Hopkins probably never forgets anything.

#6

ROMAN GONZALEZ

53-4 (42 KOs), 2005-present
Titles held: Strawweight (WBA); Junior flyweight (WBA); Flyweight (Ring, WBC); Junior bantamweight (WBA, WBC)

Gonzalez fought in relative obscurity for years, his time in the world spotlight was pretty brief and it ended with a spectacular fall from grace, but during that time he aced the eye test like he'd stolen the answers ahead of time. The peak version of "Chocolatito" just did everything right: impeccable footwork that kept him balanced, in position and in control; fearless prowess in the pocket; multi-level combinations so well conceived and executed that the first punch was already setting up the fourth, each driving the next in a fluid swarm. And everything did damage; everything counted. A devoted pupil of former three-division champion Alexis Arguello, Gonzalez honored his fellow Nicaraguan with an extraordinary blend of skill and knockout power that would see him become the smallest fighter ever to be No. 1 on The Ring's pound-for-pound list.

After a 16-fight knockout streak to begin his career, Gonzalez earned the WBA strawweight title in 2008, defended it three times and then moved up to junior flyweight, where he won the WBA belt and successfully defended it five times. He then bested Akira Yaegashi to win the Ring and WBC titles at flyweight, and it was here that he had his breakout moment with a two-round evisceration of Edgar Sosa on the HBO-televised undercard of Golovkin vs. Willie Monroe. Two defenses followed before Gonzalez again pushed himself and moved up to junior bantamweight, where he became a four-division titleholder by outpointing the previously unbeaten Carlos Cuadras. And that's when it all fell apart.

Chocolatito lashes out at Omar Soto in a WBA junior flyweight title bout.

The next challenger was an obscure Thai fighter named Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, and Gonzalez (46-0 with 38 KOs at the time) suffered his first loss by way of a disputed majority decision. In an immediate rematch, Sor Rungvisai knocked him out cold in the fourth round. After two disputed losses in his trilogy with fellow maestro Juan Francisco Estrada, Gonzalez has had something of a career resurgence and the magic is still there, but he is nearing 40.

#5

NAOYA INOUE

31-0 (27 KOs), 2012-present
Titles held: Junior flyweight (WBC); Junior bantamweight (WBO); Bantamweight (undisputed); Junior featherweight (undisputed)

Like Gonzalez at his best, Inoue is both technician and knockout artist, but while his boxing skills aren't quite as sublime, his punching power is on another planet. And so far, that power has traveled with him as he has gone from 108-pound titleholder to 122-pound undisputed champion. His style is pleasingly aggressive, mixing speed and uncanny timing with accuracy in both hands, often in scalding combinations, and he's among the top counterpunchers in boxing – maybe the best. Those twin hammers are also rooted in footwork that can switch from nimble attack mode to pyramid-like stability in an instant. Knockouts have come from left hooks, straight rights, uppercuts, body shots ... good grief, the body shots. Every tool is at his disposal. And whatever vulnerabilities he has shown during a fight, his lapses only seem to stoke the furnace and bring out a killer instinct that bodes poorly for his foes.

A trendsetter in the practice of forgoing prospect status and jumping straight into the top-tier mix, Inoue won his first title in his sixth pro fight. He made one defense before skipping flyweight entirely to campaign at 115, where he took on battle-hardened Omar Narvaez, who was known for his punch resistance, and knocked him out in the second round. Seven defenses of the WBO junior bantamweight title followed, six of them stoppages, before he put on another three pounds and won a WBA "regular" bantamweight belt with a first-round knockout of Jamie McDonnell.

Inoue also won the 118-pound World Boxing Super Series, but his 2019 Fight of the Year final against Nonito Donaire was an unexpected war that some took as a sign flashing "ceiling reached." Inoue squashed that concern when he destroyed Donaire in the rematch, unified every belt in the division and moved up to face No. 1-rated junior featherweight Stephen Fulton, who didn't make it to the ninth round. The critics could be heard sharpening their knives again when Inoue, in his first and fourth fights as undisputed champion at 122, was knocked down by a left hook from Luis Nery and another from Ramon Cardenas. But in biting down and stopping both challengers, all Inoue did was reinforce his pound-for-pound claim.

Inoue dusts Emmanuel Rodriguez to become bantamweight champion.

#4

OLEKSANDR USYK

24-0 (15 KOs), 2013-present
Titles held: Cruiserweight (undisputed); Heavyweight (undisputed)

Only slightly less eye-watering than Lomachenko's resume, Usyk's amateur record was 335-15 and he too brought home an Olympic gold medal for Ukraine. He turned pro as a cruiserweight in 2013 and won his first world title in his 10th fight, battling the very tough and previously undefeated Krzysztof Glowacki to a unanimous decision in Poland. This version of Usyk was still a bit raw.

His first defense was a ninth-round stoppage of Thabiso Mchunu in a bout that showed what would become a common narrative for Usyk: In the beginning he's a good fighter, and by the end he's a great fighter. As his comfort level increases, so do the similarities to his aforementioned countryman, which makes sense because Usyk trained with Lomachenko's father, Anatoly, as an amateur and would go back to him in 2017 as a pro. Usyk is so skilled defensively – able to remain close by deflecting or slipping punches, able to control the fight from range and utilizing impeccable footwork to flow from one extreme to the other with ease – that he can afford to spend time figuring out what's in front of him. Once he has, he doesn't just fight his opponents; he surrounds them. His ability to step around and attack before his foe can adjust, his baffling combinations that utilize every possible angle and exploit every opening … not to belabor the comparison to Loma, but he can do it all, and he does it in a 6-foot-3 body carrying 200+ pounds. That's a testament to his athletic abilities and incredible conditioning; he only seems to get stronger as a fight unfolds.

The skills, the punch volume and the mobility alone would make him unique, but the intangibles are what have truly elevated him. Once he had cleaned out the division and become the undisputed champion, thus challenging Evander Holyfield as the greatest cruiserweight of all time, he would go on to follow "The Real Deal" again by becoming the undisputed heavyweight champion. He slew the giants of his era – Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury, twice each – through intelligence and pure willpower, morphing as the situation required and, when only having more fighting spirit would make the difference, dipping into a well that seems to reach the center of the earth.

Usyk repeated his victory over Daniel Dubois with a fifth-round KO.

Crawford proved his welterweight superiority by stopping Errol Spence.

#3

TERENCE CRAWFORD

42-0 (31 KOs), 2008-present
Titles held: Lightweight (Ring, WBO); Junior welterweight (undisputed); Welterweight (undisputed); Junior middleweight (WBA); Super middleweight (undisputed)

Crawford is the man of the hour after the Hall of Fame-worthy feat of becoming an undisputed champion in a third weight division. That brilliant display of boxing against Canelo becomes a pound-for-pound triumph when you add that Crawford had only recently been a champion at welterweight, had only fought once at junior middleweight, skipped middleweight entirely and challenged a man who was in the discussion to name the best super middleweight of all time. And all of *that* took place after Crawford had already been undisputed at 140 pounds and a champion at 135.

Given his weight range, Crawford is a gift to anyone who enjoys mythical matchups. Pick a Four King and go to town. And in addition to having a list of skills that would read like cherry-picking a buffet of all the fighters mentioned so far, "Bud" might be the scariest fighter in this top 10, with maybe the exception of Inoue. Crawford is typically a slow starter, but so are great white sharks. He doesn't mind giving up a round or two, because gathering information is an important part of his process, and there's a sense of dread that builds as he calmly circles and pokes at his opponents to find their weaknesses. And when he does finally begin to unpack his toolbox, it contains an array of both hammers and scalpels (and maybe a pair of pliers). As rounds roll by and Crawford increases the pressure, you can tell that the Nebraskan likes his job (see Errol Spence Jr.).

He has so many options, in fact, that you never know which Crawford you're going to get. Maybe he doesn't either. He's the best switch-hitter in the sport but sometimes doesn't switch stances once during a fight. He's a ruthless finisher but can also hold back, be patient and rely on counterpunching to get the job done safely; he's far from reckless. But even when he's being "safe," the dog is bound to get out eventually.

Before we get to the top two, it's worth remembering that Crawford, Inoue and Usyk are still very much active. Crawford and Inoue in particular have looming matchups that could take them even higher on this list.

#2

MANNY PACQUIAO

62-8-3 (39 KOs), 1995-present
Titles held: Flyweight (WBC); Junior featherweight (IBF); Featherweight (Ring); Junior lightweight (Ring, WBC); Lightweight (WBC); Junior welterweight (Ring); Welterweight (WBA, WBO); Junior middleweight (WBC)

No boxer's story since Mike Tyson has captured the popular imagination the way Pacquiao's has. In his rise from street urchin to senator, the Filipino icon has done incredible things, including the standalone achievement of winning titles in eight weight divisions.

Perhaps more than anyone on this list, Pacquiao's success as a fighter was built on extraordinary physical talents. His hands were searingly fast, but they also carried power (look at the faces of Antonio Margarito, David Diaz and Miguel Cotto after sharing the ring with him). His feet were just as quick, enabling him to step around and punch from the sides or launch signature lunging attacks from long range with destructive power in both the lead right and follow-up left. Adding another dimension to all of this was spine-cracking upper-body agility that allowed him to get very low or punch while tilted. Pacquiao's reflexes and accuracy further complemented his speed. And it wasn't just the speed of the attacks themselves, but also the relentless pace at which they came. Most of his opponents simply couldn't handle the effort of fending him off. In his prime, Pacquiao also had pure one-punch KO power, as seen most dramatically against Ricky Hatton in the 2009 Knockout of the Year.

Pacquiao decked Lucas Matthysse three times before stopping him in seven.

But all the things that made him "PacMan" may have also been his greatest liability. He sometimes relied too much on his superpowers to keep him safe and had a tendency to get reckless in his enthusiasm, leaving himself wide open for the right fighter to capitalize, as Juan Manuel Marquez did in the 2012 Knockout of the Year.

There's not enough space here to go through the names and numbers of Pacquiao's landmark achievements, which include being The Ring's Fighter of the Year three times, but it's safe to say boxing will never see anything like him again.

#1

FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.

50-0 (27 KOs), 1996-2017
Titles held: Junior lightweight (WBC); Lightweight (Ring, WBC); Junior welterweight (WBC); Welterweight (Ring, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO); Junior middleweight (Ring, WBA, WBC)

The Best *Ever*? That's a different discussion, one likely to draw everything from derisive scoffing to go-team woofing. For this article, the race between Mayweather and Pacquiao was extremely close, edged only by a single vote. But that's always the way it's been between these two, with the fight that should have settled the question taking place well past the point of deciding anything but profit margins. And now they're talking about doing it again. If we were ranking the effect fighters have had on the sport, Mayweather would probably top that list as well. He has set the bar, however unrealistically high it is, for what modern-day prospects want to achieve professionally. Unfortunately, many of those prospects forget the part about being a great fighter.

Mayweather was actually one of the most promising figures at the end of the 20th century, winning the 1998 Fighter of the Year award at the age of 21 after a seven-bout run that culminated in winning the WBC junior lightweight title against Genaro Hernandez and defending it against Angel Manfredy. He held the belt until 2002, when he began his march up the scale with a controversial win over Jose Luis Castillo for the Ring lightweight championship. At welterweight, Mayweather won a second FOTY award in 2007 for back-to-back wins over De La Hoya at junior middleweight and Hatton (the famous "check hook" fight) at welterweight.

He could certainly find the knockouts when the opportunities presented themselves, but Mayweather's brilliance was in his reflexes, timing, fast hands and defense, which allowed him to stand in front his opponents and either slip punches or deflect them off his shoulder while he laced pinpoint counters through any gaps. His dominance didn't require anybody else to make the first move, though. He could also lay down a beating, as seen in early fights against Diego Corrales and Arturo Gatti. Overall, he excelled in virtually any situation, which was typically under his control after he figured somebody out and even more so after they got frustrated and started getting sloppy. Mayweather was often criticized for being a "safety-first" fighter, but there's a healthy amount of bias in saying that if a fighter isn't getting hurt, they must not be taking risks. In an unbroken string of victories against some of the best fighters of his time, Mayweather sometimes looked risk-averse because he made winning look so painless. »

Mayweather made Victor Ortiz pay for dirty tactics with a shuddering KO.

CENTURY HEROES

BY TOM GRAY

THE KNOCKOUT ARTISTS

1 Deontay Wilder (44-4-1, 43 KOs)
Between turning professional in 2008 and a decision win over Bermane Stiverne in 2015, Wilder knocked out 32 men in a row, then went on a streak of seven more KOs that included Stiverne in a rematch. While he's lost as many as he's won since that time, "The Bronze Bomber" is arguably the most dangerous one-punch destroyer in boxing history.

2 Edwin Valero (27-0, 27 KOs)
Valero never heard a judge's scorecard in an eight-year professional career and mashed everyone from journeymen to world titleholders with the same ferocity, accumulating sanctioning-body belts in two divisions along the way. The notorious power-puncher from Venezuela was found hanging in his jail cell while under suspicion of murdering his wife in 2010.

3 Naoya Inoue (31-0, 27 KOs)
Perhaps no ring moniker has been more appropriate than Inoue's "The Monster." Four divisions have been conquered over a 13-year career, and his power remains state-of-the-art. Inoue is unanimously lauded as the biggest pound-for-pound puncher in the world today and can knock an opponent out with either hand.

4 Gennadiy Golovkin (42-2-1, 37 KOs)
No fighter this century has been more feared. Between November 2008 and September 2016, GGG knocked out 23 consecutive opponents, most of them in world title fights. The Kazakhstan native's suffocating pressure and power forced many name opponents to avoid him while he systematically dominated the field at 160.

5 Artur Beterbiev (21-1, 20 KOs)
When a Beterbiev opponent goes punch-for-punch, they lose by KO. When a Beterbiev opponent boxes and moves, he catches them and they lose by KO. OK, Dmitry Bivol is the lone exception, but it's impossible to overstate the dominance that Beterbiev enjoyed at light heavyweight. At his best, the Canadian-based Russian is brutality personified.

6 Adonis Stevenson (29-2-1, 24 KOs)
Stevenson had already earned the reputation of a knockout artist by the time he faced Ring light heavyweight champ Chad Dawson in 2013. He was, however, still a prohibitive underdog. In just 76 seconds, Dawson was stopped when he was unable to recover from a colossal left-hand knockdown. Nine successful defenses followed for "Superman," six of which ended inside the distance.

Wilder stopped former Olympic champ Audley Harrison in 70 seconds.

7 Nonito Donaire (43-8, 28 KOs)
The left hook of Nonito Donaire has been one of the most explosive punches of the century so far. That shot has scooped "The Filipino Flash" two Knockout of the Year awards (Vic Darchinyan in 2007 and Fernando Montiel in 2011) and rendered several world-class fighters in multiple weight classes unconscious. Far from being a one-punch fighter, the great Donaire has chilling power.

8 David Haye (28-4, 26 KOs)
They didn't call him "The Hayemaker" for nothing. While Haye had a patchy run at heavyweight, he did pick up a WBA title and score some pulverizing knockouts against naturally bigger men. However, the hard-hitting Englishman was devastating at cruiserweight, where he unified and was only extended the distance once in 19 brutal wins.

9 Sergey Kovalev (36-5-1, 30 KOs)
"Krusher" was only taken the distance twice (an eight-rounder and a six-rounder) in 22 fights before dethroning Nathan Cleverly for the WBO light heavyweight title in 2013. At the top level, the knockouts continued, with the Russian fighter demolishing a set of formidable contenders during his title reign.

10 Manny Pacquiao (62-8-3, 39 KOs)
While the knockouts dried up when "PacMan" reached welterweight, the Filipino legend was a power-punching destroyer between 112 and 140 pounds. Pacquiao stopped elite-level competition in several weight classes during his meteoric rise and had the power to switch off bigger opponents with a single punch.

FIGHTS OF THE CENTURY

1 Diego Corrales TKO 10 Jose Luis Castillo
May 7, 2005, Mandalay Bay Events Center, Las Vegas
Titles: Ring, WBC, WBO lightweight
In perhaps the finest exhibition of inside fighting ever seen, Corrales and Castillo duked it out like there was no tomorrow before an electrified crowd. "Chico" produced the miracle, rising from two knockdowns in Round 10 to secure an unforgettable triumph in the very same round. For many insiders, this stands as the greatest boxing match of all time. The Ring's 2005 Fight of the Year.

2 Erik Morales SD 12 Marco Antonio Barrera
February 19, 2000, Mandalay Bay Events Center, Las Vegas
Titles: WBC, WBO junior featherweight
Morales was installed as a prohibitive favorite to turn back the challenge of his red-hot countryman. Barrera, however, had other ideas and dragged "El Terrible" into a life-and-death battle contested at the highest level. Despite suffering a knockdown in the final round, Morales secured the controversial decision in the opening chapter of a dramatic trilogy. The Ring's 2000 Fight of the Year.

3 Micky Ward MD 10 Arturo Gatti
May 18, 2002, Mohegan Sun Casino, Uncasville, Connecticut
Titles: Junior welterweight non-title bout
Sometimes the stars align. Like Ali vs. Frazier and Hagler vs. Hearns, Gatti and Ward were made for each other. It was friendly outside the ring, but when the bell rang for the first of three battles, it was all-out war. Divine intervention may have helped Gatti recover from a body-shot finisher in Round 9, but it was Ward who earned the victory on points. The Ring's 2002 Fight of the Year.

4 Erik Morales UD 12 Manny Pacquiao
March 19, 2005, MGM Grand, Las Vegas
Titles: Junior lightweight non-title bout
Morales had lost two fights in his trilogy with Barrera. Pacquiao had annihilated Barrera in November 2003 and was expected to do the same to another Mexican great. But that's not how boxing works. In arguably the finest showing of his Hall of Fame career, Morales outpunched the rampaging Pacquiao in a brilliant 12-round war. The exchanges during the final round, during which Morales turned southpaw, have to be seen to be believed.

5 Shane Mosley SD 12 Oscar De La Hoya
June 17, 2000, Staples Center, Los Angeles
Titles: WBC welterweight
The undefeated Mosley had been a long-reigning lightweight titleholder and was already pound-for-pound rated. However, he had recently moved up two weight classes and had barely settled at 147, and it was a prime De La Hoya in the opposite corner. With an inspired display, Mosley took the best "The Golden Boy" had to offer and pulled away on the cards in the championship rounds. One of the greatest welterweight title fights ever.

6 Felix Trinidad TKO 12 Fernando Vargas
December 2, 2000, Mandalay Bay Events Center, Las Vegas
Titles: IBF, WBA junior middleweight
It all looked like too much for Fernando Vargas. Down twice in the opening minute against arguably the most ruthless finisher in boxing, "El Feroz" was in hell. However, youth and plenty of guts got the

Corrales turned the tables on Castillo in their epic first encounter.

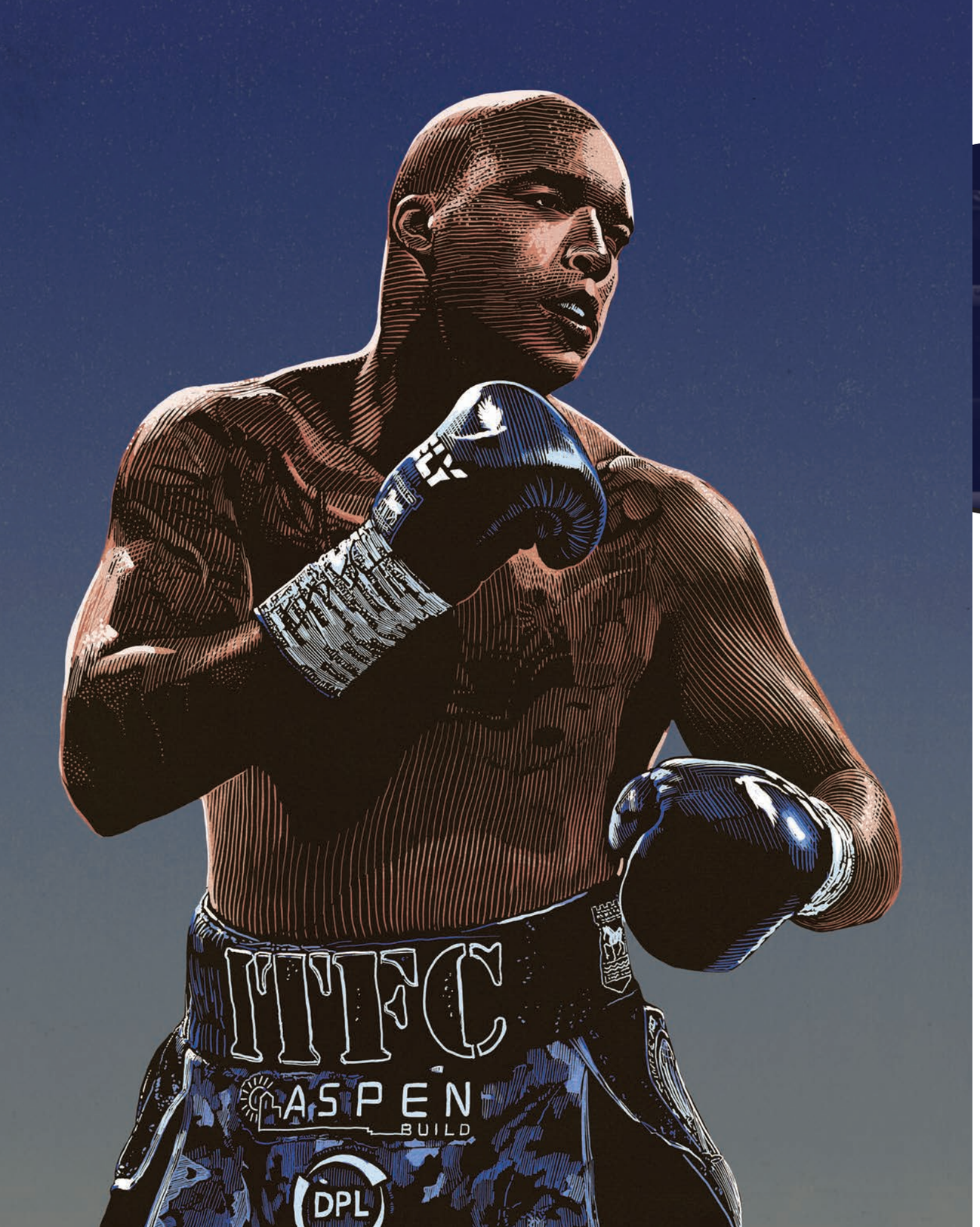
California firecracker through an awful Round 1. Tito was down in the fourth and absorbed plenty of punishment before reestablishing command and taking Vargas out in the final round. Can you think of a better fight at 154?

7 Israel Vazquez SD 12 Rafael Marquez
March 1, 2008, Home Depot Center, Carson, California
Titles: Ring and WBC junior featherweight
They'd already fought twice the previous year, and maybe the only reason the first bout (won by Marquez) didn't win Fight of the Year for 2007 is that the award went to the rematch (won by Vazquez). Expectations for the decider were therefore huge. In a fierce battle between Mexican pound-for-pound dynamos, the ebb and flow shifted one way, then the other. A dramatic knockdown in the final 10 seconds by Vazquez tilted the numbers in his favor. The Ring's 2008 Fight of the Year.

8 Naoya Inoue UD 12 Nonito Donaire
November 7, 2019, Super Arena, Saitama, Japan
Titles: Ring, IBF, WBA bantamweight
The bantamweight final of the World Boxing Super Series looked ominous. It was old lion vs. young lion, with the 36-year-old Donaire seemingly being set up for the kill by the 26-year-old Inoue. However, "The Filipino Flash" took "The Monster" to the depths of hell in a classic battle, busting Inoue's orbital bone and hanging tough against the Japanese star before dropping a decision. The Ring's 2019 Fight of the Year.

9 Canelo Alvarez MD 12 Gennadiy Golovkin
September 15, 2018, T-Mobile Arena, Las Vegas
Titles: Ring, WBA, WBC middleweight
Following the controversial draw in fight one, a rematch between Canelo and GGG, the world's best middleweights, was a natural. Neither fighter was down or seriously hurt, but the quality of the action, particularly on the inside, was extraordinary. Canelo got over the line by the smallest of margins on that rare occasion when a sequel surpasses the original. The Ring's 2018 Fight of the Year.

10 Juan Manuel Marquez KO 6 Manny Pacquiao
December 8, 2012, MGM Grand Garden Arena, Las Vegas
Titles: Welterweight non-title bout
The rivalry between Marquez and Pacquiao was as intense as it had ever been going into fight four. Pacquiao was up 2-0-1 in the series but had never truly dominated the Mexican star and was determined to secure a definitive victory. In a spectacular fight, both men had been down by the time the bell rang for Round 6. Marquez's out-of-the-blue right-hand knockout was as violent a finish as boxing has ever seen. The Ring's 2012 Fight (and Knockout) of the Year.



WINNER IN **PLAIN** SIGHT

FABIO WARDLEY IS IN THE HABIT OF TEARING UP THE SCRIPT AND SECURING LAST-GASP TRIUMPHS. THE HARD-HITTING ENGLISHMAN IS NOW POISED FOR HIS GREATEST-EVER CHALLENGE – AND WE'VE LEARNED NOT TO WRITE HIM OFF.

By Dom Farrell

Fabio Wardley trudged back to his stool. He was losing the fight against a boxer with far more experience and notable amateur schooling.

"I called him back to the corner and said, 'Fab, what's going on?'" coach Rob Hodgins recalls. "It was hostile. Fab says, 'Calm down, I've got him.' Then he dropped him in the first 30 seconds of the round."

But this scene is not from Wardley's hellacious contests with Frazer Clarke, Justis Huni or Joseph Parker, heavyweight wars from which he has emerged as the newly elevated WBO titleholder. It went down back in 2016, in the fourth and final bout of Wardley's brief but much discussed career on the white-collar boxing circuit. His opponent was Wayne Bayliss, a 35-year-old boxer in his hometown of Newmarket, England, who'd had both a decorated amateur career and two prison stints for violent offenses.

"I know the referee, and he gave him about a 20 count because he didn't want to get beaten up by this 200-strong crowd, who are calling the other guy's name," chuckles Matt Brennan, the owner of the Suffolk Punch Boxing Club in Ipswich, where Wardley walked through the doors, aged 20, looking to find an outlet for his athletic prowess after injuries dashed his dreams of becoming a soccer player.

"The guy got up, and then Fab just finished him off after that."

It laid out the story that has recurred multiple times over recent years, one that often ends with opponents laid out and Wardley making a mockery of popular wisdom. He battled to a draw against Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS WORMELL

Clarke in March 2024 before scoring a sickening knockout in the first round of their rematch that October. "Big Fraze" sported a visible jaw injury after being left out of his feet by Wardley's blows.

In his next fight, a homecoming showdown with the then-unbeaten Huni at Ipswich Town soccer stadium. Wardley lost nearly every round before landing a sledgehammer overhand right in the 10th to poleaxe the Australian.

Then came the finest night of his career so far and one that leaves the 31-year-old within touching distance of boxing immortality in 2026. Joseph Parker's wins over Deontay Wilder, Zhilei Zhang and Martin Bakole had put him next in line for Usyk. He entered the ring against Wardley at the O2 Arena as the clear betting favorite and was ahead on the cards.

But Wardley hurt him in the second round, buzzed him regularly and did more notable damage during the closing seconds of the 10th. Under a Wardley onslaught in the next session, when Parker did not offer enough of a response to satisfy Howard Foster, the referee waved it off. Wardley collapsed on the floor and was embraced by an ecstatic Hodgins.

Hodgins and Brennan have been with Wardley ever since he stepped into their gym as a gangly, ambitious and fearless youngster over a decade ago. Perhaps a little too fearless.

"One of the first times he came in, the first or second time, he asked to spar," Brennan says. "And I'm like, 'You're crazy. You're not sparring. It takes a good three, four, five months...' And then I turned around – we used to have two rings in our gym, I'm watching one ring – and next thing you know, he's pushed himself in there to spar the amateurs in the other ring. So he literally had the confidence from day one."

Hodgins takes up the story: "I would like to say that he did extremely well on that spar, but that would be lying to you. He found out how hard sparring was. But after that, he just never left the gym."

The broad brush of Wardley's career paints an irresistible picture. From "white-collar" – which isn't friendly amateur boxing competition between doctors, lawyers and executives, as the name suggests – to the cusp of a world title. A modern-day Rocky story, featuring a throwback fighter with a granite jaw and dynamite in his fists. But this is not a fun-time slugger rolling the dice; there are many finer details to underestimate at your peril.

"He showed he had quick feet, he showed he had quick hands, he showed his power, but you also saw that he's got a chin and he's got a heart."

An almost unnoticed progression to 4-0 as a young professional who had bouts pulled more often than he fought brought Wardley to the brink of turning his back on boxing, but this man with no amateur credentials and no professional experience of any note was already being called in as a sparring partner for Derek Chisora and Dillian Whyte. He had something. He always has. For example, the Parker fight was one his team earmarked as a winnable assignment for a couple of years prior to getting the job done.

"That's where he's different. You can teach someone how to box and you can teach them to be more powerful and you can teach them to be quicker on their feet," Brennan says. "Fab's got those attributes and he's improved on all that, but things like the heart and the determination and his mind, that's all natural, and a lot of those skills you just can't teach.

"That's why we believe he's built differently, and I think the last fight was the first time that you saw a bit of everything that Fab's got. He showed he had quick feet, he showed he had quick hands, he showed his power, but you also saw that he's got a chin and he's got a heart. You've seen bits of that beforehand, but this was a fight where it all came together against Joseph Parker."

In 2018, harboring frustrations over a stalled fledgling career on the small-hall scene, Wardley called Whyte for advice during his long drive back from a sparring session. He was invited back for a few more rounds and further conversations, at which point "The Bodysnatcher" came on board in a managerial capacity. Fight No. 5 of Fabio's career was his first outing at the O2 Arena, on the undercard of Whyte and Chisora's thrilling rematch.

It was the start of one of Wardley's most consequential relationships in boxing and led, indirectly, to another. Taken under Whyte's wing, Fabio became a regular fixture on Matchroom cards. One such occasion came in the COVID-necessitated surroundings of Gibraltar for Whyte's rematch win over Alexander Povetkin in March 2021.

On that undercard, Wardley overcame former world title challenger Eric Molina in five rounds to move to 11-0. "We came back, Fab sat me down and said 'Look, Rob. We're both learning on the job; I do think we need extra help,'" Hodgins recalls. "We went through the history of boxing where Angelo Dundee would help out with Sugar Ray Leonard, Ray Arcel would help out with Roberto Duran's coach."

Their top pick for the Dundee/Arcel role was Ben Davison. For his July 2022 fight with Chris Healey, Wardley traveled to Davison's base in Harlow, Essex, for weekly sessions. A second-round stoppage followed, from which point a closer union developed between Wardley, Hodgins, Brennan, Davison and the latter's esteemed video analyst, Lee Wylie.

"Fabio invests in himself," Davison says. "He has a nutritionist. He has a strength and conditioning coach. He already had a boxing coach in Rob. He's then brought us on board. And he travels to and from Ipswich to come here to do those sessions. I know you have a promoter, but part of the job is for you to promote yourself as well. He films his content. He's got guys on his social media.

Wardley's power was decisive in the late rounds against Parker.

"When he leaves the gym, it's not just 'job done.' He's focused and he watches the scout reports, videos, analysis. Whatever it is that we've put together for him, he's on that. That's the important stuff. I feel like a lot of fighters, they walk into the gym, do their couple of hours, leave and then that's job done. That's not enough, nowhere near enough for you to maximize your potential."

The training methods that Davison and Wylie have honed in Harlow, featuring focused video study and repeatedly drilling scenarios in the gym, have made them simultaneously two of the most praised and criticized coaches in British boxing.

Success stories such as former WBA featherweight titleholder Leigh Wood, Wardley and fast-rising heavyweight Moses Itauma make their approach tough to argue against. However, high-profile defeats such as Anthony Joshua's shellacking at the hands of Daniel Dubois in September 2024 gave proponents of the old school an opportunity to stick the boot in.

Davison bristles at the idea that he and Wylie are complicating the noble art. On the contrary, the aim is to simplify the grave demands upon

a fighter in the heat of battle, and few in the sport today are more adept at wading through heavy fire than Wardley.

"I think it works so well for him because he's under no illusions. There's just complete trust," Davison says. "They say 'do this,' I'm going to do my best to try and do that. That's why it works for him. And sometimes sticking to the wrong plan is better than sticking to no plan. Not to say we're magicians or anything, but he sticks to the plan, and that's why it works for him.

"We will look at an opponent and then look at how Fabio's tendencies match up against his in terms of what's good about this matchup for us. We'll also look at what's bad about us for this matchup, and we'll put together some things to say, 'Look, this opponent's got a habit of doing this; when you do this, his response will typically be that. The way to capitalize on that is this.' Or it will be a case of, 'Look, you need to be aware you've got a habit of doing this. This opponent will typically react like this when you do that, so you need to be aware of that. You need to either make an adjustment and not do the things that you normally do or just be ready to defend in this moment.'

"It sounds more complicated than it is, but it's actually not. It's simplified. In the NFL, there are 22 players on the [field] at the same time, but they put together scout reports – situations that might occur. If they can do that with 22 people on the [field], we can do it with two guys in a boxing ring, right? It's not that difficult.

"People think that we crunch numbers and do data and all that, but it's simple stuff. There's footage of James Toney [sitting] around with his coach [watching tapes]. People say, 'Oh, old-school coaches, you didn't have this with old-school coaches.' No, you had it more. Mike Tyson used to sit there watching fights with Cus D'Amato. There's actually less of it now than there used to be. That's the issue."

"You get fighters that are a sharp type of power [or] fighters who are heavy-handed, just weighty, dense. I feel like Fabio's got a bit of both."

Coaching drills, Wardley's dedication and his intrinsic gifts all provide the platform for the thing we've really come to see and the attribute that could lead Britain's latest world heavyweight titleholder to the top of the mountain against all odds: raw and genuine knockout power.

All but one of Wardley's 20 professional victories have come via KO. The anomaly is a four-round points win in his debut. Davison knows a thing or two about heavyweight power, having taken Itauma, Joshua and Tyson Fury on the pads, among many others.

"You get different types of power," he says. "You get fighters that are a sharp type of power [or] fighters who are heavy-handed, just weighty, dense. I feel like Fabio's got a bit of both. Also, if you were to put him in a DEXA scan and get his bone density checked, I would imagine it's extremely high.

"With that and his athleticism, no matter what gloves you put on him, you can feel his knuckles. The weight of the shot as well as the snappiness and the sharpness that he's got. And that's combined with him being a committed puncher. He's brave. If we say to him, for example, 'Look, in this situation, there's a bit of a risk, but commit to your shot here, because there's a chance you could chin 'em,' There's no hesitation. He'll just commit to it, and I think that works for him."

There'll similarly be no hesitation from Team Wardley if it ends up being Usyk next. Indeed, it is unlikely any opponent in the great Ukrainian's career will have been so familiar with him before facing off under the bright lights.

Around the time of his fruitful sparring gigs with Whyte in 2018, Wardley also spent a month in Ukraine to assist Usyk with preparations for his final cruiserweight bout against Tony Bellew. Fabio was called back for two more weeks ahead of his heavyweight debut versus Chazz Witherspoon in October 2019.

Hodgins estimates his man has sparred somewhere in the region of 50 to 60 rounds with Usyk, having returned enamored with training techniques that he has incorporated into his own routine.

"The dream is to fight Usyk," he said, speaking to The Ring before Usyk's decision to vacate the WBO title, which saw Wardley elevated from interim to full titleholder in the aftermath of his win over Parker. "I know we are massive underdogs. Fab's gonna have to have his A-game against Usyk because he's fighting someone who is, pound-for-pound, the best in the last 20 years.

"But we believe in Fab. Usyk has beaten very top, decorated amateurs who turn professional, Olympic gold medalists and people like that. But he hasn't faced anyone like Fab. Fab's rawness and inexperience at that level could be Usyk's downfall and our gain. We're in a no-lose situation; we've got everything to win. No one expects us to win, but what if we do?"

It will be the tallest task yet in a career where Fabio Wardley has made an irresistible habit of doing what no one outside of his small and dedicated team expects.

Justis Huni was miles ahead against Wardley before being taken out.

PROSPECT WATCH:

Emiliano Vargas

By Michael Rosenthal

Filmmakers recently approached promoter Bob Arum about a project they were planning, a movie about his onetime protege Oscar De La Hoya.

The plot, they told Arum, will focus in part on the fan reception – particularly among adoring young women, who Arum remembers "went crazy" – when The Golden Boy fought Patrick Charpentier at El Paso's Sun Bowl in 1998. De La Hoya's good looks and charisma, combined with his ability, made heads spin.

The filmmakers asked him whether he knew a good candidate to play De La Hoya in fight scenes. The first name to come to his mind: Emiliano Vargas, a rising prospect and son of De La Hoya's most bitter rival in the past, Fernando Vargas.

"Wouldn't it be something to have a Vargas playing De La Hoya?" Arum said.

Arum didn't think of the younger Vargas solely because of the boxer's pretty face and magnetism, although he has been blessed with those qualities. The 21-year-old junior welterweight also reminds Arum of a young De La Hoya in the ring – skillful, quick-handed, powerful and possessing a you-have-no-chance-to-beat-me swagger.

De La Hoya became the face of boxing in the 1990s and

early 2000s and ultimately landed in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Arum and others believe Vargas has all the ingredients to go down a similar path, although they acknowledge that he's just getting started.

"I think he's very talented, very skilled," said Hall of Famer Tim Bradley, who has worked as a TV analyst for most of Vargas' fights. "More importantly, he has his head on right. A lot of times, kids whose father had success are born with silver spoons in their mouth, so to speak. They're raised up having everything.

"I think [Emiliano's] dad did a great job with the boys, making them earn everything. And he has that Vargas blood in his system. He's a fighter through and through."

The elder Vargas actually has three sons who fight professionally – Emiliano, Fernando Jr. and Amado – all of whom he trains. However, Emiliano is universally seen as having the most potential, which can be attributed in good part to the fact he started boxing at a younger age than his brothers.

The Vargases had recently moved from Southern California to Las Vegas when Fernando Sr. was asked to hand out trophies at an amateur tournament. He brought 10-year-old Emiliano along.

"As soon as he got there, he was mesmerized," the elder Vargas said. "His eyes were wide open. He says in Spanish, 'Daddy, I want to do that.' I say, 'You don't want to do that.' He says, 'Yes, I do.' I said, 'OK, if you ask me after school tomorrow to take you to the gym, I'll take you to the gym.

"The next day I pick him up and he says, 'Are we going to the gym?' I became a trainer that day."

And Emiliano became a fighter. He reportedly finished his amateur career with a record of 110-10 and seven national championships. Rather than following the lead of his father – a 1996 Olympian – and pursuing a berth on the U.S. team, though, he opted to turn professional at 18.

Vargas has skills and ring IQ that belie his years.

He seems to have made the right move, as he has made a strong impression so far: He has won all 16 of his fights – 13 by knockout (10 inside two rounds) – in a vicious seek-and-destroy style that boxing fans of both genders crave.

What makes the young Vargas so good? He was born with speed and athleticism, which he inherited from his father. He has the 120 amateur fights under his belt, which means the fundamentals are part of his muscle memory. And, by all accounts, he's a straight-A student of the sweet science. He's a sponge in the gym.

For example, one of his strengths is his ability to switch from his natural orthodox stance to a southpaw stance. And, as his father recalled, it was his son's idea.

"One day, when Emiliano was a kid, maybe 10 or 11, he says, 'Dad, teach me how to fight as a southpaw.' I taught him. Now he knows both guards. If he has a problem figuring out a guy, he just turns southpaw. He can do the whole fight as a southpaw if he wants. He's that talented. And he does everything I tell him to do, everything."

That last comment wouldn't surprise Bradley, who said Vargas shows improvement every time he sees him fight. The young man obviously works hard at his craft. And just as important, he said, father and son "are working on the right things."

Of course, this has been the routine for more than a decade, which has produced as complete a fighter as you're going to see in a 21-year-old. He has no obvious weaknesses. However, when Bradley was asked whether there is anything in Vargas' formidable arsenal that stands out, he didn't hesitate to answer.

"He's a hell of a counterpuncher," Bradley said. "I think that sets him apart. He has great vision in the ring, great timing. He really has it all – speed, power, great left hook. He reminds me of a young De La Hoya, although I think he might be looking better at the same point of their careers.

"… And I love his mentality. He's confident but not cocky, not arrogant. He says all the right things. He doesn't drink, he doesn't do drugs, he doesn't stay out late at the bar. He's a serious young man. Man, he's 21 years old, but he seems like he's 30. He seems like a grown man. I think that has to do with everything he's gone through, looking at the mistakes his father made and listening to his father.

"He knows certain things brought down his dad. He knows if he stays away from that, with his skills and work ethic, he could accomplish more than his father."

The elder Vargas had a hell of a career, becoming the youngest ever to win a junior middleweight title at 21 when he stopped Yory Boy Campas in 1998 and then beat Raul Marquez, Winky Wright and Ike Quartey in succession during the following two years.

Winning has become an addiction for Vargas, who is 16-0 (13 KOs).

However, it was around the time of that streak that drinking started to get the better of him. He lost his title to Felix Trinidad by knockout in 2000 and was never the same. That's not lost on his son.

"Dad was an alcoholic for a time," said Emiliano. "He put on 100 pounds between camps when he fought [Shane] Mosley. You can't do that. I have to give him credit, though. He did it all by himself [without the guidance of a father]. It's not easy knowing right from wrong. He was a young kid who made a lot of money. I give my father props for what he did for my family, for every punch he took for me and my brothers.

"… My father tells me all the time, 'You're me if I never touched alcohol. I owe it to him to dedicate my life to this. I would be disrespecting my last name if I did otherwise."

Indeed, the younger Vargas loves what he does too much – and is too determined – to risk everything. He loves the gym. He loves to do the roadwork. "I'm going on a 10-mile run after this interview," he said like a kid on his way to Disneyland. And, more than anything, he loves winning.

As he put it, he's addicted not to foreign substances but having his hand raised. And he doesn't plan to break the habit.

He completed his first 10-rounder against Jonathan Montrel on November 15 in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, winning a shutout decision. Now it's on to bigger fights and a chance to win a world title before the end of the new year, meaning he'd wear a major belt at only 22.

"Write it down!" he said. "2026 world champion. Let's get it!" After that? No limit.

"I really fell in love with winning after my first amateur fight," Vargas said, "the feeling of putting everything into something and then seeing the fruits of that. If I do something, I want to be the absolute best. And I realized along the way that, 'Hey, I AM good at this.' And I never looked back. I believe this run in the Vargas dynasty can be the best run yet. I feel what my father did … it's hard to fill those shoes. But I'm going in with my own shoes. I'm expecting nothing less than greatness for myself.

"… I'm happy to hear what my promoter said," he went on, referring to Arum's comparison to De La Hoya. "My promoter has not just had many world champions, he's a legend in the sport. So that speaks volumes. I'm blessed to hear it. Now I just have to continue to do what I've been doing. I have to become a world champion a couple of times and cement my legacy in the history books. I want to be one of the faces or THE face of boxing."

Arum has one bit of advice: Be patient.

"Stay on course," he said. "Don't get overly ambitious. We'll bring him along fight by fight. Then, when he's ready, like Oscar, he'll beat everybody in front of him." RING

JUNIOR MIDDLE GROUND

A POTENTIALLY ERA-DEFINING FIGHT BETWEEN **JARON ENNIS** AND **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.** IS NEARING IGNITION IN THE 154-POUND DIVISION

By Corey Erdman

For somewhere between five and seven years, Jaron "Boots" Ennis and Vergil Ortiz Jr. have been shouldered with the burden of being labeled the Future of Boxing.

Of course, there are fruits that come with having lofty expectations – television time, bigger purses, more exposure. But when the expectation is that you are the next star in the sport, one of the men to carry it into the next era, there are constant questions being asked about you – and of you – by the boxing public. Is he overhyped? When are you going to fight the big names? Because once that label is applied to you, the line of fans and fighters looking to prove it wrong is longer than the one with people hoping the scouting report is correct.

Ennis and Ortiz essentially traveled a parallel path as the Future and have simply emerged as the Present, a feat that's accomplished only by a special few. Every day, there is a

promoter, manager or even a self-confident fighter proclaiming that the next boxing star has arrived. The vast majority of those dreams die somewhere in the developmental stages, and before long the bombastic press releases get filtered into the junk bins of reporters' email accounts. Only a handful of those prospects ever emerge as contenders. Even fewer become championship-caliber fighters, and only a few per era wind up being a part of the mainstream discussion the way Ennis and Ortiz have.

Both men came into the public's consciousness around the same time, between 2018 and 2020, becoming regular fixtures on prospect development shows on separate platforms. Ennis blossomed mainly on Showtime, where he is a part of an illustrious list of *ShoBox* graduates, while Ortiz cut his teeth on *Golden Boy Fight Night* shows and undercards of larger events. Their formative years occurred during a time of deep division in the sport, when fighters on the PBC/Showtime side of the aisle rarely mingled with those under any other promotional tent or broadcast outlet such as DAZN. In baseball terms, Ennis and Ortiz would be like an American League and a National League team – kept separate unless they were to clash in a mega event, the World Series.

Except, of course, boxing is not like baseball or any other sport in terms of its scheduling. Not only could Ennis and Ortiz's paths not cross without a miraculous thaw occurring between business entities, but they also couldn't find themselves in the ring with any of the other "good teams," even the ones in their own league.

For a long time, the two men were burdened with proving a level of potential and talent that their opposition couldn't fully validate. In some ways, it was the Roy Jones Jr. paradox: Was he matched soft, or was he just so good that he made his opposition look inept? Ennis and Ortiz generally blasted their way through opponents who were otherwise durable and competitive in a fashion so dominant that it wowed many viewers but made others cynical, especially in Ennis' case.

Ortiz closed the gap on Erickson Lubin, then unleashed hell.

Cris Esqueda

When prospects look the way Ennis and Ortiz did in their ascent, there is always an eagerness about seeing them in the ring with the biggest stars of the day. Those who believe the talent level is as advertised want to see themselves proved right, and the skeptics relish in seeing the balloon of a hyped fighter popped. The first time Ennis mentioned wanting to fight Terence Crawford was in 2018, and it wasn't long before Ortiz was speaking about wanting fights with both Crawford and Errol Spence. Those possibilities have been discussed consistently ever since.

As the cycle of fantasy-to-rumored fights came and went, allegations of ducking on all sides abounded in the boxing community. Some felt as though Ennis and Ortiz were too dangerous a proposition and didn't bring enough value to the table for bigger stars; others felt as though the youngsters and their promoters were manufacturing a mirage through softer matchups while secretly ducking bigger opportunities.

This is the nature of boxing discourse – fittingly rooted in combative debate for a sport that is simply a fight. Only a few fighters get the opportunity that Crawford did against Canelo Alvarez recently, where he was able to completely erase all prior dialogue and prove that he is indeed who he always said he was. The rest carry the burden of proof and are constantly looking for ways to shed it.

Ennis became a world titleholder for the first time in 2023 when he was upgraded by the IBF at welterweight after Crawford vacated. He defended three times against David Avanesyan, Karen Chukhadzhian and Eimantas Stanionis, in the third also unifying with the WBA title and winning the vacant Ring championship. Those versions of Chukhadzhian and Stanionis would have made for a hellacious night for 99% of the welterweights in the world at the time but were rendered ineffective, and in Stanionis' case nearly unconscious, by Ennis. The greatest conflict in either fight was in Ennis' corner, where he expressed frustration about the fact that he was dominating thoroughly but hadn't yet knocked Chukhadzhian out, the equivalent of being up by 10 runs but upset that you hadn't hit an upper-deck home run yet. It was as blatant a depiction of a fighter hitting their head on the ceiling of available opposition as one can remember, a fighter fixating on side quests because the main mission was too easy.

Ortiz's welterweight run peaked with destructive wins over Maurice Hooker, Egidijus Kavaliauskas and Michael McKinson, wiping out the "second tier" of 147-pound contenders that was available to him in violent fashion. However, Ortiz's greatest battle at welterweight would be physiological, as recurring bouts of rhabdomyolysis hospitalized him on more than one occasion, and was party to a near-two-year absence from the ring between 2022 and 2024. As the issues persisted, concerns about whether Ortiz could ever return to the ring began, followed by sheer concern for his wellness. However, a move up to 154 seemed to revitalize Ortiz. No longer having to torture himself to get down to the welterweight limit, he dispatched Frederick Lawson and Thomas Dulorme in less than a round each.

Ortiz would find his first true challenge in Serhii Bohachuk, hitting the canvas twice in a Fight of the Year contender. He followed it up with a

Uisma Lima lasted just under two minutes against Ennis in October.

Matthew Heasley

risky matchup against Israil Madrimov, grinding out a unanimous decision victory against an opponent who worked to suppress Ortiz's trademark torrid output as much as possible.

And so here we are, with both Ennis and Ortiz being called the Future of Boxing. But there's an obvious problem with two men sharing a singular label. Which is to say that at the end of the day, it was Ennis vs. Ortiz that we really hoped for.

That day appears to be looming. Timing, physical changes and opponent availability weren't all on their sides at 147. According to Ring Magazine's Mike Coppinger, Ennis only temporarily turned down a bout against Ortiz earlier this year, preferring to test the waters at junior middleweight first.

Ennis barely dipped his toe in at 154 before he proved that he had no use for water wings anymore. Uisma Lima, a respectable contender but a 30-to-1 underdog against Boots, couldn't make it out of the first round after being utterly overwhelmed by the speed and power of the Philadelphia phenom. After the fight, Ennis drove home a few miles from the Xfinity Mobile Arena in Philadelphia and rested up before flying to Fort Worth, Texas, to sit ringside at Ortiz's bout against Erickson Lubin.

It didn't take much longer for Ortiz to take care of his business. Midway through the second round of the bout, Ortiz's power had already rattled Lubin, who found himself with his back against the ropes against one of the sport's most thunderous offensive practitioners. Even with Lubin's gloves glued to his face, the sheer force of Ortiz's blows rendered him unconscious on his feet.

There is historical precedence for can't-miss stars who either didn't or couldn't have their biggest moments at 147 but eventually found them at 154. Wilfred Benitez, who lurked in the shadow of Ray Leonard, Roberto Duran and Thomas Hearns at 147, found his greatest nights at junior middleweight after losing to Leonard at 147. He outpointed Roberto Duran in an oft-overlooked classic, and produced perhaps the knockout of the decade over Maurice Hope. Mike McCallum found himself in a similar but even more sequestered position relative to The Four Kings, but found the brightest lights at 154 against Julian Jackson and Donald Curry, producing sensational knockouts against both.

It may sound absurd to compare Ennis and Ortiz to Hall of Famers when their own resumes don't contain any future Hall of Famers. However, times and industry demands have changed, and the two young headliners have, through no fault of their own, not been given adequate opportunity to fully validate those gaudy late-2010s scouting reports.

Mark Robinson

Boots was punch-perfect against Stanionis, stopping him in six.

Richard Pelham

Ortiz was a step ahead of Israil Madrimov and won wide on points.

Until now.

Moments after Ortiz had rendered Lubin unconscious, the DAZN cameras panned to Ennis seated a few feet away from the ropes. Ennis, in sunglasses, a hoodie and at least one fight purse's worth of jewelry, simply pointed to his watch and mouthed the words "it's that time." Before long, they were face-to-face inside the ring with DAZN's Chris Mannix and his microphone between them.

"I think this is the fight that has to happen, man," Ortiz said to Ennis. "I think this is it."

The two went back and forth, volleying allegations of the other "talking shit" after each alleging in the media that the other was ducking them. The same conversations fans once had about the big names avoiding them were now directed toward them – a sign that they'd become the big names they aspired to be.

"We started talking after you guys started talking," said Ortiz. "It's retaliation. It's retaliation."

"It don't matter," Ennis said. "The time is now. It's that time to see this money, and let's make this fight happen. You a great fighter, you looked tremendous, but I'm gonna show the world I'm the best in the world."

It's an era-defining fight between two of the young, charismatic, powerful stars in the sport. Ennis and Ortiz are two of the most viscerally entertaining fighters in boxing. If you're a boxing hardcore, you certainly know what you're looking at when you watch them in the ring. But even if you aren't, it's clear that there's something different about these two. The way Ennis seems to glide and dance in the ring, the way his punches whiz and blur from different angles, his resplendent ring gear sparkling and flowing. Or the way Ortiz gallops and tracks down even the most fleet of foot opponent, like a horror movie villain that is always exactly where you don't want them to be, around every corner you turn, before unleashing his frenzied, concussive combinations.

It would be two fighters with video game-like attributes meeting at the absolute peak of their powers, a dream fight for the sport, and one that even those who like to peer into the boxing snow globe only occasionally will undoubtedly enjoy.

Those who win these types of fights or perform valiantly in them entrench themselves as the legends of their particular era. The expectation that Ennis and Ortiz would become that was placed upon them at first by themselves, then by their managers and promoters, and finally by the industry and its broadcasters. As noted fight fan Mark Twain supposedly once said, "Today's burdens can strengthen you for tomorrow." The burden of proof has been theirs to litigate for the last seven years, and there is only one reasonable doubt left. RING

Sweet SUCCESS

WHEN OPPORTUNITY CALLED, **CHERNEKA JOHNSON** ANSWERED IN SPECTACULAR FASHION, UNIFYING FOUR WORLD TITLES AND ENSURING BIGGER NIGHTS TO COME

By Anthony Cocks

It was a historic night at Madison Square Garden on July 11, 2025.

A capacity crowd packed the stands for the eight-fight card featuring boxers from nine different countries. Nearly 6 million viewers tuned in to Netflix to watch the show, headlined by the trilogy bout between undisputed junior welterweight champion Katie Taylor and Amanda Serrano.

And there was not a single male boxer in the ring.

While it wasn't the first all-female card in boxing history – that honor goes to a small club show in Hawthorne, California, in February 1979 – it was by far the most significant. Backed by Jake Paul's Most Valuable Promotions, the event was designed to prove that women's boxing could thrive on its own. Record purses, a near 20,000-strong live crowd and global exposure through Netflix made the night a watershed moment for the sport.

Among those who seized the spotlight was Cherneka "Sugar Neekz" Johnson.

The New Zealand-born Australian hadn't even been scheduled to fight. But fate intervened when Ring Magazine bantamweight champion Dina Thorslund discovered she was pregnant just five weeks before her bout against Shurretta Metcalf. Thorslund vacated her WBO title and was granted champion-in-recess status by the WBC, leaving Johnson, the WBA titlist, and IBF champion Metcalf to unify all four belts. Thorslund remained the Ring champion.

Johnson didn't waste her chance. Despite taking the fight on short notice, she dominated Metcalf from the opening bell, working her way inside the taller fighter's reach to land thudding power shots with devastating effect. When the referee stopped the fight early in the ninth frame, Metcalf protested, but the result was clear: Johnson's relentless pressure had overwhelmed her.

It was arguably the most dominant display of the night.

"I was very happy with my performance," said Johnson, 18-2 (8 KOs), who received a career-high payday for the bout. "I was always confident leading into this bout. It was a short camp, but a productive one. We knew once I got past her long jab, I could go to work. Her balance wasn't great, and I took advantage of that."

The bright lights of New York are a long way from Tauranga, New Zealand, where Johnson grew up. A self-described tomboy, she spent her childhood running barefoot to school, scrounging food from friends and playing tackle with the boys during recess. Life seemed carefree, but beneath Tauranga's postcard beauty lurked social problems – drugs, gangs and violence.

Johnson dominated Metcalf in their July unification bout.

When Johnson was 11, her family moved to Australia seeking a better life. They settled on the Gold Coast, a decision that would change everything.

"I would've been about 12 when I went into a YMCA gym with my dad for fitness," Johnson, 30, recalled. "[Former IBF lightweight titleholder] Phillip Holiday was the trainer, and after the first session he told my dad, 'She's got a bit of a fighter in her.' From there, it became my passion. I was addicted."

It was a sliding door moment that shaped the rest of her life.

Johnson began training with coach Allan Nicolson, father of Aussie boxer Skye Nicolson, at the Albert Boxing Club. She had her first amateur fight at 16 and quickly rose through the ranks, winning three national titles, three Golden Gloves championships and gold at the 2011 Junior World Championships.

At 21, with over 60 amateur fights under her belt, she turned professional.

The pro game suited Johnson. She signed with Hosking Promotions and started racking up the wins. Two years later, she captured the WIBA bantamweight title, but her first true test came in 2021 against veteran Shannon O'Connell. In the end, O'Connell's experience was the story of the fight. Johnson suffered her first professional defeat via split decision.

"You can't dwell on the past.

You just figure out how to move forward," Johnson said. "The first fight I lost to Shannon, I didn't really feel like I lost. I wasn't going to cry over it and wonder what I could've done better. You just plan how to move forward."

That mindset paid off. A year later, Johnson edged Mexico's Melissa Esquivel in Melbourne to win the IBF junior featherweight title, becoming only the second female boxer of Maori descent to claim a major world title after Daniella Smith in 2010.

Just as her career gained momentum, tragedy struck. A month before her first title defense against former champion Susie Ramadan in 2022, Johnson's younger brother Levi was ambushed and killed outside a Brisbane gym. He was just 23.

Devastated, Johnson considered withdrawing from the contest. But she decided to push forward in Levi's honor.

"There was a moment where I thought, 'Can I even do this?'" she remembered. "But then I realized this was going to be the first fight my brother attended. I felt like he'd want me to go through with it."

Johnson flew interstate for Levi's funeral, then headed straight back to Sydney to continue her training camp.

The Ramadan bout turned into a blood-soaked battle. Johnson's nose was busted early, and a clash of heads opened a deep gash on her forehead. By the end of Round 2, her white top was stained pink with blood. But she refused to wilt.

By Round 4, Johnson regained control, dropping Ramadan with a left hook and dominating the second half of the fight. Despite the nasty cut, she powered through to win a wide unanimous decision.

Johnson raised her arms up to the heavens after the fight.

"I think Levi had something to do with getting me through that kind of adversity. He was there with me, supporting me and guiding me," she said.

Johnson lost her title in her next bout to crafty Brit Ellie Scotney at London's Wembley Stadium in 2023. Scotney's slick movement frustrated Johnson, who was soundly outboxed over 10 rounds.

"With that loss, I knew there were things in my camp that needed changing," Johnson admitted. "But I also knew I wasn't done. I knew what the best version of me looked like."

Still, there were some positives to come out of the Scotney fight. Johnson raised her profile and made global headlines at the pre-fight weigh-in when she appeared topless, her torso covered in body paint promoting her new sponsor, OnlyFans.

"That was a media stunt, and it worked," she laughed. "OnlyFans has actually allowed me to box full-time. Without their support, I'd be struggling."

A year later, Johnson was back in the world title picture. In May 2024, she moved down in weight to challenge undefeated WBA bantamweight champion Nina Hughes on the undercard of Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. George Kambosos Jr. in Perth. Johnson edged the 41-year-old Hughes by majority decision, then left no doubt in their rematch 10 months later, dominating and stopping the Englishwoman in seven rounds.

Her resurgence didn't go unnoticed. When Thorslund's pregnancy left a slot open on the Madison Square Garden supercard, Johnson's team immediately reached out.

"When I wasn't initially on the card, I had major FOMO," Johnson admitted. "I'd wanted to fight Dina or Shurretta anyway. After my win over Nina, I was ready. Everything just fell into place."

Johnson made the most of the opportunity, unifying all four major sanctioning body titles at 118 pounds with her decisive win over Metcalf. The performance earned her Fighter of the Year honors at the annual Australian National Boxing Hall of Fame awards, making her the first woman ever to receive the accolade.

Johnson was set to defend her four world titles against The Ring's No. 5 contender, Amanda Galle (12-0-1, 1 KO), on the undercard of Jake Paul's bout against Gervonta Davis in Miami on November 14. However, Davis' most recent domestic violence allegations canceled that show. Paul is now scheduled to face two-time former unified heavyweight titleholder Anthony Joshua on December 19 at the same Miami venue, and according to Johnson's management team the Galle fight will be rescheduled on the undercard of that show.

The Ring does not expect Johnson to have too much difficulty turning back the challenge of the Canadian. Netflix will once again broadcast her fight.

At just 30 years of age, Johnson's time at the top is just beginning. Big fights await her this year, none more so than against the undefeated Thorslund (23-0, 9 KOs). The Ring title remains at the top of her bucket list.

"I'm in the best shape mentally I've ever been in. That's not arrogance – it's belief," said Johnson.

"I'm sure I'm gonna collect that belt soon, too. I have so much confidence in myself right now. I know the work I've done and what I bring to the table. I know what I'm capable of."

On a night when women's boxing reached new heights at Madison Square Garden, Cherneka Johnson's journey – from barefoot kid in Tauranga to undisputed world champion – stood as proof of her grit, resilience and evolution.

In 2026, "Sugar Neekz" wants all the smoke, something she has earned the hard way.

ALL-OUT WAR

WHEN **GEORGE FOREMAN** AND **RON LYLE** THREW DOWN 50 YEARS AGO, THERE WAS NO FEELING-OUT PROCESS, NO TACTICAL APPROACH AND NO THOUGHT OF CONSERVING ENERGY. PAIN WAS THE TOP PRIORITY.

By Tom Gray

Less than four months after Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier had concluded their epic trilogy with "The Thrilla in Manila," fight fans the world over would be treated to another heavyweight collision that will never be forgotten.

Former champion George Foreman going against feared contender Ron Lyle on January 24, 1976, is arguably the most brutal puncher vs. puncher matchup that boxing's glamour division has ever produced. The ebb and flow of the action was astonishing. The punishment inflicted by both men was horrific. Hardened ringsiders looked on in awe.

Incredibly, Foreman vs. Lyle was a free-to-air broadcast on ABC television. Such was the excitement that veteran broadcaster Howard Cosell sounded close to hyperventilating during the live call, his words marred by static as the microphone seemed to struggle at containing his dramatic shrieks.

Both men were badly hurt in every round, even in the second, which due to timekeeper error was only two minutes long. Lyle, under heavy pressure when the bell rang to end that session, was the beneficiary of that oversight.

Foreman prevailed at 2:28 of Round

5, overcoming severe damage and two knockdowns in the fourth to claim a career-defining triumph. Lyle, who was floored twice himself, would never win the championship, but his incredible performance against Foreman became the keystone moment of his career.

The Ring celebrates the ultimate heavyweight brawl as we close in on the 50th anniversary of Foreman vs. Lyle.

FIGHTER RECORDS/ PRE-FIGHT ODDS

The 27-year-old Foreman (40-1, 37 KOs) was coming off his first professional defeat, having lost the championship to Ali in "The Rumble in the Jungle" on October 30, 1974. He had taken part in a notorious and ill-advised exhibition against five fighters in Toronto before gearing up for the Lyle fight with a more meaningful exhibition against Jody Ballard. Still, the 15-month layoff was, to that point, the longest of Foreman's professional career by far.

Lyle, 34, had an impressive record of 31-3-1 (22 KOs). His only losses came against the very best: Jerry Quarry (UD 12), Jimmy Young (UD 10) and Ali (TKO 11). In his most recent outing, Lyle had picked himself up off the canvas to annihilate another authentic knockout artist, Earnie Shavers (KO 6). The Ohio-born slugger was in excellent fighting shape and had been substantially more active than Foreman.

The oddsmakers viewed Foreman's youth and world championship experience as crucial, installing the colossal Texan as a prohibitive 5-to-1 favorite.

FORM GUIDE: LAST SIX FIGHTS

FOREMAN

Date	Opponent	Result
Oct. 30, 1974	Muhammad Ali	L KO 8
March 26, 1974	Ken Norton	TKO 2
Sept. 1, 1973	Jose Roman	KO 1
Jan. 22, 1973	Joe Frazier	TKO 2
Oct. 10, 1972	Terry Sorrell	KO 2
May 11, 1972	Miguel Angel Paez	KO 2

LYLE

Date	Opponent	Result
Sept. 13, 1975	Earnie Shavers	KO 6
May 16, 1975	Muhammad Ali	L TKO 11
Feb. 11, 1975	Jimmy Young	L UD 10
Dec. 13, 1974	Al Jones	TKO 5
Sept. 17, 1974	Boone Kirkman	TKO 8
July 16, 1974	Jimmy Ellis	UD 12

Much of the action took place in close, with both fighters throwing knockout shots exclusively.

Legendary heavyweight champ Joe Louis poses with the fighters.

PURSES: BLOOD MONEY

After losing the championship to Ali, Foreman's stock plummeted. His guarantee for Lyle was $250,000, which is a mere 5% of the $5 million purse he made for the Ali fight.

As the great former champ would later recall, this kind of pay drop was expected during the golden era.

"The thing that's really changed [in boxing] is there's money available for heavyweight champions to fight just about anyone," Foreman told The Ring in 2016. "In the '70s, you only made big money by taking on a world champion who put bread on the table."

The $140,000 Lyle received represented the second-highest payday of his career to that point. He earned approximately $300,000 for his unsuccessful title challenge against Ali.

WHO WAS RON LYLE?

As a youth, Lyle was a gang member. He served seven and a half years at a Colorado penitentiary for second-degree murder and learned to box during that time.

After he was released, Lyle had a successful, albeit brief, amateur career, the highlights of which were two knockout wins over Duane Bobick. In his second win over Bobick, at the 1971 Nationals, the stricken fighter lay unconscious for five worrying minutes.

The 30-year-old Lyle was eager to turn professional and exited the unpaid ranks with a 25-4 record. He made his debut in April 1971, while Bobick would go on to represent the U.S. at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

In the first two years of his professional career, Lyle posted 19 straight wins and scored 17 knockouts before being outpointed by Jerry Quarry.

WEIGHTS

Both men came in at what were career-high numbers at the time. Foreman weighed in officially at 226 pounds, while Lyle was six pounds lighter on the scales.

A NEW HOME FOR BOXING

Foreman vs. Lyle was the first boxing event held at the Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion in Las Vegas. Over the next several years, this 4,500-seat indoor arena would host more spectacular fights, including Ken Norton vs. Larry Holmes, Wilfred Benitez vs. Sugar Ray Leonard, Salvador Sanchez vs. Wilfredo Gomez, Donald Curry vs. Mike McCallum, Evander Holyfield vs. Michael Dokes, and Pernell Whitaker vs. Azumah Nelson.

THE RING AWARDS

Foreman, who also defeated Joe Frazier (TKO 5), Scott LeDoux (TKO 3), and John Dino Dennis (TKO 4) in 1976, was named the Ring Magazine Fighter of the Year for the second time.

The Foreman vs. Lyle bout was named the Ring Magazine Fight of the Year, beating out all four of Ali's title defenses, as well as other notable bouts

such as Wilfred Benitez UD 15 Antonio Cervantes and Carlos Monzon UD 15 Rodrigo Valdez.

The Ring Round of the Year was awarded to the fourth and fifth rounds of the Foreman vs. Lyle bout. In the 80-year history of this award, this is the only time that two rounds have received the honor.

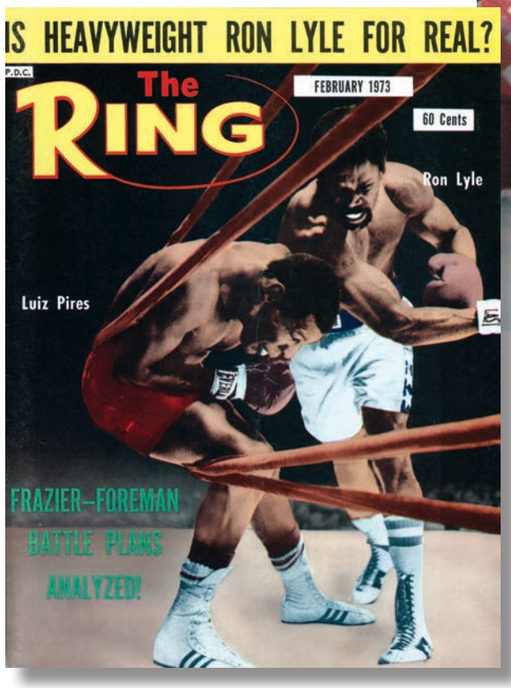
BY GEORGE

In an interview conducted with The Ring in late 2015, Foreman shared his memories of the heavyweight war that became a battle for survival:

"It's one of the finest moments I ever had in boxing. The media had said so many bad things about me [following the Ali loss], and I kept trying to defend myself. What better way to defend yourself than to prevail in a fight like that?"

"Rarely do two pure punchers get matched together. Muhammad [Ali] and Joe [Frazier] was boxer versus slugger. Muhammad and I was boxer versus puncher. The closest thing to my fight with Ron Lyle was probably Sonny Liston versus Cleveland Williams." (Liston won by TKO 3 and TKO 2 in 1959 and 1960, respectively.)

Mark Robinson



"I've always said Ali is the only fighter to truly defeat me in the ring, because the other guys just survived. They deserved victory for going the distance. Ron Lyle was one guy who refused to run, refused to be intimidated and stood there and had a fight. He physically hurt me. Nobody else ever did that."

"It was my first fight with Gil Clancy as trainer, and I also had Kid Rapidez, who is rarely mentioned. Rapidez was a former fighter who helped train former welterweight champion Jose Napoles. Both Gil and Kid got me in tremendous condition for Lyle, and I needed it."

"When Lyle floored me, the first thing through my mind was, 'What excuses do you have now, George? He's knocked you down, you're hurt, and when you get up, he's gonna knock you down again.' I said to myself, 'I'm getting up and you'll just have to kill me.'

"I lived through that match and was redeemed."

THE RING RATINGS: HEAVYWEIGHT (JANUARY 1976 ISSUE)

CHAMPION: Muhammad Ali

1. Ken Norton
2. George Foreman
3. Joe Frazier
4. Jimmy Young
5. Ron Lyle
6. Joe Bugner
7. Earnie Shavers
8. Duane Bobick
9. Check Wepner
10. Randy Neumann

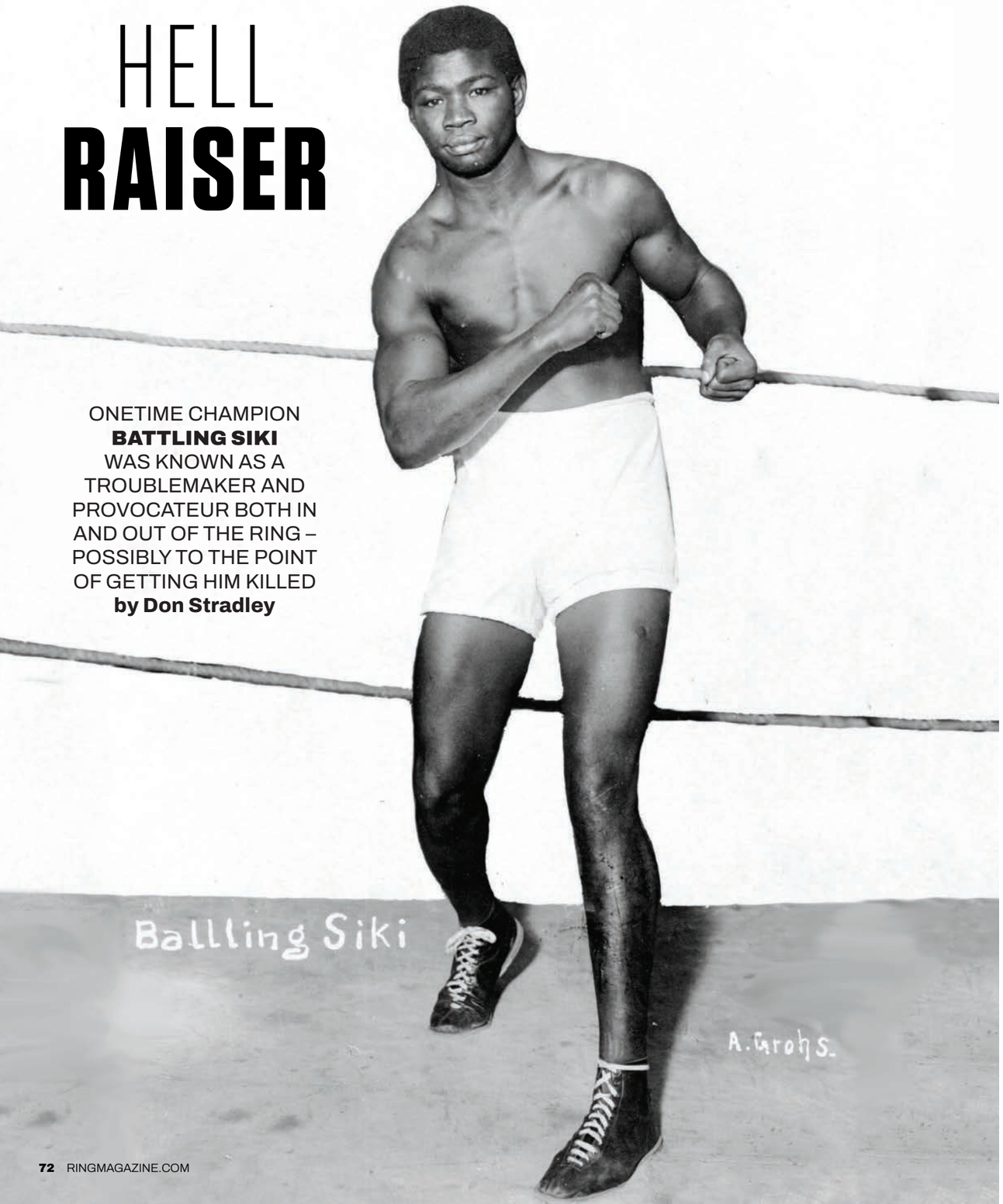
"When I look at the fight today, I often ask myself how I got through it. The truth is that I don't really know. Lyle hit so hard that he froze me at times. There was no way you could prepare yourself for that kind of punishment in training. No way."

"Other than my victory over Joe Frazier to win the heavyweight title, my redemption against Ron Lyle means more to me than all of them. After the Ali loss, I was a shell of myself. I walked around for over a year and could barely face people. I was so low and kept making excuses.

HELL RAISER

ONETIME CHAMPION **BATTLING SIKI** WAS KNOWN AS A TROUBLEMAKER AND PROVOCATEUR BOTH IN AND OUT OF THE RING – POSSIBLY TO THE POINT OF GETTING HIM KILLED

by Don Stradley



A patrolman discovered the corpse at 4:10 a.m., December 16, 1925. The body of a young Black man was face down in the gutter at 348 West 41st Street. There were three cents in his pocket and two bullet wounds in his back.

Such a find wasn't so unusual in a Manhattan neighborhood known as Hell's Kitchen, allegedly named by the local police for its hellish atmosphere and rampant crimes. But this time, the corpse belonged to a man who had been the light heavyweight champion of the world, a flamboyant brawler known as Battling Siki. He was 28.

Siki had been a familiar presence in the area and was known for three things: being drunk, being broke and causing trouble. "He was a good husband," said his wife, Lillian, "but he was just a mischievous boy."

What sort of mischief resulted in Siki's murder?

Whether he was walking his pet lion cubs down the Champs-Elysees in Paris or destroying barrooms like they were matchstick houses, Siki's eccentric approach to life had made him a natural headline-grabber. Though initially depicted by his manager as an untamed jungle man, reporters eventually learned he'd been born in the French colony of Senegal in West Africa. His real name was Amadou M'Barick Fall, and he purportedly spoke several languages. His complex personal life included a common-law wife back in Paris, whom he'd abandoned to marry Lillian. He'd also served honorably during the First World War. But even if he wasn't the ignorant savage that his manager described, Siki was a sort of manchild, stubborn, silly and probably an alcoholic. In the shadow world of boxing where few could be trusted, he was lucky to have lasted as long as he did.

In 1922, he'd won the light heavyweight title from Georges Carpentier in France. Siki and others claimed the contest had been rigged for Carpentier to win, but the strongman from French Senegal ignored the arrangement and stopped Carpentier in the sixth. Siki lost the title soon after in Dublin to Mike McTigue. Siki claimed Irish soldiers had threatened to shoot him if he hurt their man.

Sans title, Siki hoped to resurrect his career in America, but he'd apparently left all his skills at the bottom of a champagne glass. His fights played out like farces. Siki clowned for the audience, standing up between rounds to break out the latest Broadway dance craze – the Charleston – while waiting for the bell. It was this version of Siki, more court jester than gladiator, that landed in Hell's Kitchen, a place where unsolved murders were as common as fire hydrants.

Just hours before the murder, a patrolman named John Meehan spotted Siki stumbling down 9th Ave in his usual drunken state. Siki said hello and lurched away into the darkness, supposedly to his home nearby on West 42nd Street. Meehan found Siki's body a short time later.

Three months passed before detectives locked in on a suspect, an 18-year-old local punk named Martin Maroney. Undercover cops had overheard him discussing the murder

Siki in his prime, shortly after winning the light heavyweight crown.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRONKAAART

as if he knew something about it.

Maroney wrote out a statement while under arrest, declaring he'd seen Siki go berserk in a restaurant. Maroney denied being involved in the murder, though he implicated others. Yet none of the people he named were ever charged. Maroney was released. The mystery lingered.

Peter Benson, who authored a lengthy biography of Siki in 2008, proposed that a group of Manhattan gamblers and mobsters had targeted Siki after he had reneged on deals to throw fights. After all, he'd claimed to have double-crossed Carpentier's backers in 1922 and apparently thought nothing of continuing the unadvised practice. The main fight in question involved Jimmy Francis, whom Siki had allegedly agreed to carry. Instead, Siki knocked Francis out in two rounds on July 23, 1925.

Days later, Siki was found unconscious and bleeding on West 41st Street. Siki, who had been stabbed in the neck, was unclear about what had happened. And when police brought in a suspect, a 25-year-old thug named John Hanrahan who had been snooping around the crime scene, Siki declined to press charges. Benson suggested this incident was the mob's first attempt on Siki's life and that whoever was behind it told his flunkies to wait and try again.

Much of Benson's mobster lore sprung from a comment by noted French journalist Gaston Bénac, who claimed Siki had scammed gamblers on four occasions and had upset a "second-rate gangster." Bénac purportedly overheard this from Bob Levy, Siki's manager at the time of his death.

Building on Bénac's comment, Benson packed his gangland theory with anecdotal evidence, namely that Hell's Kitchen was overloaded with gangsters, and that other boxing figures had died in those years under mysterious circumstances. The final ingredient was the veil of secrecy that blanketed Hell's Kitchen. "You could bet if Siki was killed by the mob," Benson wrote, "the killer wouldn't come to trial."

Still, there's no real evidence, not in Benson's book or elsewhere, that Siki's murder was part of an underworld conspiracy. With Siki, whose history was full of missing chapters, the tendency is to fill the gaps with colorful guesswork. Other theories have included owners of local speakeasies, tired of Siki's loutish behavior and unpaid debts, hiring someone to kill him. The police, with whom Siki often clashed, were also suspected. At the least, many believed the cops knew exactly who killed him but let the matter lay because Siki was Black and a troublemaker.

Before any of these theories evolved, the consensus was that Siki owed money to someone and, in his naivete, had broken a rule of the street: He'd stiffed somebody on a loan and flouted it. Not even a former boxing champion could be forgiven for such a misstep in Hell's Kitchen.

The scuttlebutt was that Siki had created a disturbance in a place called The Coffee Pot and left without paying his tab. From the earliest reports, Siki was said to owe $20 to some unnamed figure, a sum that was repeated constantly.

Siki's widow verified that her husband had owed "a Greek named Jimmie" $20 (about $370.00 in today's money), and that he had been killed because of an argument over some bootleg booze. She also said that someone had stolen Siki's overcoat the night before. Did someone steal Siki's coat as collateral for the money he owed?

The last time Lillian saw Siki, he said he was returning to the place where the coat had been stolen. Perhaps the reports of him causing a disturbance had to do with the coat and his attempt to settle things.

Bob Levy's brother Harry told the Montreal Gazette in 1948 that Siki's murder was indeed related to his owing money at a speakeasy, claiming "two tough kids" followed Siki home and shot him.

Additionally, a Hell's Kitchen woman purportedly heard the shots that killed Siki and looked out her window. She claimed to have seen two men leaving the scene and jumping into a taxicab. Apparently, two cracks from a handgun weren't enough to alert anyone else on the block at 4 a.m., but that was life on West 41st Street in 1925.

By the 1930s, when city corruption was under siege and Mayor Jimmy Walker resigned in disgrace, the Siki case was forgotten. It's rather unbelievable that not one hoodlum or shady cop ever told what they knew, though there could be reasons for this. A secret is easier kept if it involves only one or two people. Therefore, a vast underground conspiracy is unlikely. One man with a gun on a dark street was all it took. And if the assassin never shared his secret, it was because he felt no guilt over it.

Siki's old turf is now known for upscale restaurants and luxury condominiums with views of the Hudson River. It is a mix of young professionals and students, as well as tourists on the hunt for a sushi burrito. But at one time you might've seen Siki strutting along the sidewalk, wearing a cape and a top hat, inviting passersby to join him in a song or a dance, to enjoy life as he did: with gusto and pulling no punches.

Though Siki provided a neon-lit cautionary episode, it is not a story that anyone learns from. Athletes still fall under the spell of fame and money and end up in bad ways. Siki, more tragic than most, gets bundled into the stack of boxing oddities and weird tales.

Perhaps the strangest part of Siki's legacy is that he spawned, throughout the 1930s and '40s, more than 100 fighters calling themselves "Battling Siki." They appeared on undercards in backwaters across the country, usually for one or two fights before disappearing. It seemed America was full of Battling Sikis, though on that dismal December morning a century ago, as he lay dying in the street, the real Siki must've felt terribly alone.

PROMOTER SNAPSHOT:

OVERTIME BOXING

By Adam Abramowitz

"We really pride ourselves on being boxing's most innovative promoter."

Those words come from Britton Hardin, senior director of boxing operations for Overtime Boxing. In just over two years, Overtime has taken aim at what it sees as a sometimes stodgy sport, one that needs to adapt to appeal to the next generation of audiences.

"From our perspective," said Hardin, "every other sport, whether it is basketball or football or baseball, has progressed to be more fan-friendly, aside from boxing. There's a lot of mansplaining and extra explanation that goes into why this fighter won over that fighter … So all of our ideas provide not just entertainment but help to teach you how to follow the sport."

And Overtime certainly has ideas.

Every fight features a bonus for a knockout. They have "money rounds" – the first and last rounds of the fight – where if a fighter scores a knockout during one of those rounds, he or she will make even more money.

The team at Overtime feels that innovation is key in boxing.

And no draws. They have an "Overtime Round," where if a fight is declared a draw, they will hold a final round to determine a victor.

Although many of these concepts have been around in boxing in one form or another, Overtime is committed to creating a more conclusive atmosphere for its fights. All of its bouts are in an 18-by-18-foot ring to create more action (boxing rings are typically 20 or 22 feet per side). It has "Pink Slip Fights" where two fighters contest to see which one will remain on Overtime Boxing's shows; the loser will be spun off into the boxing hinterlands.

Overtime Boxing is an offshoot of Overtime, a company that has documented up-and-coming basketball and football talent with unique storytelling approaches. Within a few short years, the company received over $100 million of funding. Major investors included Kevin Durant, Jeff Bezos, Drake, Cam Newton and other A-listers. Overtime understood the huge reach of social media and how to use it to tell stories to a new generation of sports fans.

Overtime Boxing has followed its parent company's DNA in how it develops fighters. Social media is not viewed as mere lip service; it's a core tenet in the approach to growing and thriving in the boxing industry. Overtime Boxing has around 2 million followers on Instagram and 4 million on TikTok. It started a YouTube channel earlier this year and already has 100,000 subscribers.

"YOU UNDERSTAND HOW TO TELL THEIR STORY AND WHO TO TELL IT TO."

The "who" in Hardin's quote is a black box in itself when it comes to growing the sport. Although many boxing promoters are gifted in the technical aspects of storytelling, are they getting to the right audiences, the ones that networks and advertisers and sponsors covet? Overtime Boxing believes that it understands how to appeal to the younger generations, and it thinks that their approach is a big separator as it looks to grow its stable of fighters.

"You look at the numbers: Men may lie, women may lie, but the numbers don't," said Hardin. "We put a lot of emphasis on those numbers and those accounts as storytelling extensions for not just OTX (Overtime Boxing) but also for our fighters."

As Overtime evaluates fighters to sign or present on its DAZN-streamed cards, it of course is looking for boxing talent, but it is also interested in those prospective fighters' social media followings. Do they already have fan support? Are they promotable? Do they want to get their story out into the broader public? The company is looking for marketability in addition to boxing talent.

"There is a [youthfulness] about what we do," said Tony Palmieri, manager of boxing operations. "And all of us on our team are young in the industry, but with experience, and I think that translates (Palmieri used to work for New York-based Star Boxing; Hardin had previously managed fighters). So, when we are having these conversations with fighters, we know that we aren't Top Rank. We don't have 50 years of experience and all of those world champions, but we know what we provide is something different. And our fighters have responded to that."

Hardin will go into the ring and spar with his fighters. He's shared the ring with undefeated lightweight prospect Jonny Mansour (5-0, 2 KOs). He believes that his ability to get into the trenches creates an added level of engagement with his fighters.

"I still participate in the sport," said Hardin. "I go to the gym and spar. And they see me working out with them. When I'm in the town of one of my fighters, I work out with them or I might get in some rounds with them, and I think that they understand that we really know what they go through. That gives you another level of buy-in with fighters."

Overtime Boxing doesn't lack for confidence. When starting out in 2023, it did four shows on consecutive Friday nights at the Overtime Elite Arena in Atlanta. It didn't just dip its toes into boxing; it dove right into the deep end. And within those first four shows, it was able to identify and subsequently secure longer-term relationships with many of its core fighters, such as Donte Layne (8-0, 7 KOs), Haven Brady (16-0, 6 KOs), Kurt Scoby (18-1, 16 KOs), Oshae Jones (9-0, 3 KOs), LeAnna Cruz (11-0, 1 KO) and Giovanni Marquez (13-1, 6 KOs).

To date, Overtime has promoted 16 fight cards, and it has been pleased with the early results. It believes that fans have really embraced the Overtime Round and the Money Round. It has been enthused by the growth of the social media platforms for its fighters.

After only a few short years, it now finds itself in a different position in the sport. Although it's still an upstart, it is now an upstart with sanction body-ranked fighters, such as Cruz (junior bantamweight), Breyon Gorham (21-0, 16 KOs, junior welterweight), Elijah Pierce (21-2, 17 KOs, featherweight) and Andreas Katzourakis (16-0, 11 KOs, junior middleweight).

Now, in addition to presenting a compelling product for boxing enthusiasts, potential new fans and its media partners, Overtime must get its matchmaking right as its fighters ascend the rankings. It has been pleased with matchmaker Brendan Segalas, especially in his ability to identify fighters who have the necessary skill and also the right type of grit.

Overtime Boxing wants to grow its brand and see its fighters achieve success at the upper echelon of the sport. In addition, it wants to proselytize other stakeholders in boxing. It wants other promoters to see the value in incentivizing knockouts and doing away with draws. It knows boxing needs to become more fan-friendly and do a better job of appealing to younger sports consumers. And it believes in continuing to challenge the status quo in how the sport is presented.

"If we left the sport and we didn't make an imprint with our innovation," said Hardin, "the way that people receive boxing, the way that they understand it, and the way that they follow it, despite how much money we may make or our fighters may make, we would look at that as somewhat of a loss."

Middleweight prospect Nathan Lugo picked up a first-round knockout bonus in July.

SNAPSHOT FOR OVERTIME BOXING

Company:	Overtime Boxing
Established:	2023
TV/Streaming Platform:	DAZN
Principals:	Britton Hardin, Sr. Director of Boxing Operations Karrie Cornell, Director of Business Operations Tony Palmieri, Manager of Boxing Operations Brendan Segalas, Matchmaker

ALEX WALLAU'S IMPACT ON BOXING

By Jim Lampley

Alex Wallau's first definitive public imprint at ABC Sports was a fitting tribute to his unusual level of confidence and self-possession. Hired by the network's legendary chief sports executive, Roone Arledge, to help administer a new programming venture titled The United States Boxing Championships, Alex rapidly stepped up above his rank to expose the reality that promoter Don King was using the series' rights budget as a slush fund to set up exclusive contracts with an assortment of American fighters. By publicly kicking the teeth of King and the program's host, the legendary Howard Cosell, Alex Wallau established a brand of integrity that was rare for a television executive in that era.

At the time, I didn't really know Alex Wallau. But like most everyone else in the halls of 1330 Avenue of the Americas, I knew I was impressed. He had taken a massive career risk on behalf of being right. I wasn't sure how many others at his somewhat anonymous level would have done the same. When Roone chose to back him and the tournament was dissolved, I felt proud even just to know him vaguely. He clearly had a brand of DNA that was rarer than it should have been.

My own career as a network television sports broadcaster had begun as a fluke, when I was chosen from among 432 candidates in the summer of 1974 to be one of the first two TV reporters ever to stand on the sidelines of a football game with a camera and a microphone. That lucky accident opened the door for me to begin a long apprenticeship as an on-air figure at ABC Sports, which was at that time the dominant purveyor of televised sports events in the United States.

In addition to its iconic college football telecast, where I roamed the sidelines for three years before talking my way into regional play-by-play assignments, ABC had the signature anthology series ABC's Wide World of Sports, where I could cut my teeth on esoteric folk events like the Oriental World of Self Defense, the World Lumberjack Championships and the World Wrist Wrestling Championships, each of which I would cover multiple times as I paid my dues within the hierarchy of on-air stars who wore the signature double-knit yellow blazer with the ABC patch.

ABC also controlled the TV rights to five of the six upcoming Olympic Games, where I could work first as a feature reporter in 1976 and 1980, and eventually as a fledgling studio host in Sarajevo and Los Angeles in 1984. At that time, these were unprecedented opportunities for an American sportscaster my age. It only made sense my astonishing good fortune might occasion some jealousies and resentments among older network veterans who had put in more time and traditional effort, and eventually it did. Not surprisingly, one of my severest critics was the network's biggest on-air star, Cosell. But I was still only 35 years old, and Cosell was aging out.

But in 1985, ABC was bought from Leonard Goldenson by a stations ownership group named Capital Cities. As one of their first moves, they decided it was illogical for Arledge to be heading up two major divisions – Sports and News – so they rearranged the management chess pieces to reflect their priorities. Arledge surrendered control of the Sports division to focus on News. The previous ABC stations chief exec, Dennis Swanson, was transferred to head of Sports. And Swanson arrived at Sports with one outspoken priority: Who the hell is Jim Lampley? Why does he have a long-term contract with exposure guarantees? And how do I get rid of him and his contract?

Wallau was a mentor, a colleague and a dear friend to Lampley.

Swanson's first chosen solution was to put me in a position he was pretty sure would mercilessly embarrass me: He would assign me to the boxing telecast. I would slide into Cosell's ringside chair in February 1986 to cover a fight between rapidly rising heavyweight star Mike Tyson and North Carolina fringe contender Jesse Ferguson. And just to ensure my discomfort, as Swanson saw it, he would make Alex, who had never worked live on the air, my expert commentator colleague. To the new Sports boss, it looked on the surface like a sure formula for failure.

A few days later, Alex called my phone.

"Jim, where do you live?"

It turned out we were only a few blocks apart. I began going to his apartment a couple of times a week, for hours at a time, and he delivered for me a unique boxing clinic, watching videotapes of fights from recent years.

"Watch how the skilled body-puncher holds his opponent's arm on the side opposite the referee, so he can get in extra rib shots before a break. Look at how the attacker steps on his opponent's lead foot to lock into position or destroy his rhythm. Watch the infighter lock his glove onto the back of his opponent's head to set up the uppercut."

There were dozens of such lessons, every day. By the time we stepped into Alex's green Jaguar sedan and drove to Troy, New York, for me to call my first prizefight, I wasn't apprehensive. I knew I was working with a uniquely gifted expert and he wouldn't let me fail.

I was a mountain boy from Hendersonville, North Carolina, who had grown up on the golf course. Alex was a son of privilege and sophistication from tony Greenwich, Connecticut, who had somehow fallen in love with the ring early in life and spent his high school years riding the train into New York to visit the gyms in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, devoting hours every week to watching sparring sessions and talking to fighters, trainers, cutmen and boxing writers about his passion. Together we gave my career, in particular, a new trajectory.

Tyson was part of it. The very first fight we ever called was Mike's brutal performance against Ferguson, and it was partly due to Mike's comfort with Alex, who he had known for years, that Tyson uttered the infamous, often paraphrased line "I was trying to drive his nose bone into his brain" shortly after the fight.

A few months later, we went upstate again, this time for Mike's assignment against the ill-equipped Marvis Frazier. All the way up, a three-hour drive, Alex kept asking me, "Do you think I can get away with saying Mike will knock him out in the first minute?"

"Alex, you are the expert. If that is what you believe, you should say it."

Eventually he backed off. "Too iffy, too many things could prevent it." He chose to say it would happen in the first round.

Thirty-one seconds. All the way back to New York, Alex vilified himself for falling short of what he really believed.

About a year and a half later, Alex revealed to me, to his friends in the gyms, to the ringside press corps who all knew and admired him, that he had contracted throat cancer. That was 37 years ago. That fall he went to the famous cancer clinic in Houston to have barium tubes implanted into his neck to shrink the tumors. He lay still for months waiting for that to work. His wonderful wife Martha, his partner in what I am certain was the best marriage I ever saw, stayed with him until the end, which astonishingly didn't arrive until October 2025.

Every fighter, every trainer, every cutman, every Little Italy waiter who ever knew him shed tears. It was as brave a fight as has ever been undertaken, in or out of the ring. I am just one of the many who owe him love, gratitude and eternal respect.

He taught me how to call fights. It was the gift of a lifetime, and every fight I have ever called or will call is a tribute to Alex Wallau. Sleep peacefully, Alex. I love you forever. RING

Jim Lampley's best-selling memoir, IT HAPPENED! A Uniquely Lucky Life in Sports Television (Matt Holt Books) may be purchased at all major booksellers, including Amazon, Amazon UK and Barnes & Noble. It's available in hard copy, eBook and audiobook (narrated by Lampley) formats.

FIGHT OF FANTASY:

SUGAR RAY ROBINSON

TERENCE CRAWFORD

By Anson Wainwright

Let's imagine a matchup between arguably the greatest to ever lace up a pair of boxing gloves and a modern-day great coming off his finest performance and whose stock has never been higher.

Sugar Ray Robinson's superlative skills saw him win the welterweight title in the mid-1940s and later step up to middleweight, where he went on to become a five-time world champion. During that time, he beat fellow future Hall of Famers Jake LaMotta (in five of their six meetings), Carl "Bobo" Olson, Randy Turpin, Gene Fullmer and Carmen Basilio. In his prime, he was nigh untouchable, and even when the magic had dulled, it still took something special to beat the man who could do just about everything inside the squared circle.

Over 40 years after Robinson's final fight, Crawford turned professional. The early part of his career took place away from the bright lights, but after he stepped in on three days' notice to best Breidis Prescott on HBO, he never looked back. He later won the WBO and Ring titles at lightweight and went double undisputed at junior welterweight and welterweight. He surgically took apart his biggest rival, Errol Spence Jr., in nine one-sided rounds.

A move to junior middleweight yielded another title before he dared to be great in jumping to super middleweight, where he won a third undisputed championship against Canelo Alvarez.

The boxing IQ on display in Robinson vs. Crawford would be off the charts. It would be a high-class chess match in which any mistake by one would be punished by the other.

Who would reign supreme if they collided in a mythical matchup at middleweight?

RONNIE SHIELDS

Acclaimed trainer

"It's a great matchup. Sugar Ray Robinson was fast. He had the best footwork in boxing during that time, but it would [also] really work for him today, and it would be hard for guys [given Robinson's] footwork and the hand speed to even lay a glove on him. He'd have been tough for anybody; I don't care who it was. He was really good. He just had everything – offense, defense, always in shape. He had the stamina to just do anything he wanted to do.

"I think Terence was always special. He comes from a different mold from guys that fight today. He's got that old-school mentality. He works hard. He doesn't struggle with weight, always in shape, ready to go. Terence can fight southpaw, orthodox. To fight Terence Crawford, you have to be ready; you have to prepare for a southpaw and a right-hander. You know he's a guy that does everything right; he doesn't make mistakes. It's very, very difficult to beat this guy.

"Both guys are going to punch. They're not going to wait for the other, and that's why this would be a great matchup. There's going to be a lot of fireworks in a fight like that because they want to win. I lean towards Robinson because of footwork; he knows how to get in and out without getting touched, and he would make Terence throw punches and then counter over the top. And when Terence wants to come back, Robinson won't be there. I don't see there being a knockout. I would say Robinson by points."

Prediction: Robinson PTS

STEVE KIM

3 Knockdown Rule Podcast

"This would be a pairing of two incredibly well-rounded craftsmen who also possess incredible toughness. The intangible that both have is elite toughness and a competitive spirit that very few have. But keep this in mind: Robinson is the naturally bigger fighter in this matchup. Crawford would make things difficult with his ability to switch-hit (and to my knowledge, Robinson didn't face all that many southpaws) and his counterpunching skills.

"But when it's all said and done, Robinson is thought of by many as the greatest pound-for-pound fighter who ever lived. There wasn't anything he couldn't – or wouldn't – do inside the ring. I see a fight that is very tactical early, with both men being relatively cautious. By the middle rounds, things would loosen up and there would be some heated exchanges. In the late rounds, it would become a battle of wills. In the end, I think Robinson's power would edge the fight in his favor."

Prediction: Robinson PTS

PAULIE MALIGNAGGI

Former two-weight world titleholder

"I think guys in that era need to be credited with laying the building blocks and foundation of the sport and carrying it in the heyday. Robinson is loved by boxing historians. I think he revolutionized the sport in his time with his athletic style; he had power and explosiveness that a lot of guys couldn't put together at that time. Having said that, I am one of those that also views the sport as athletes get better and better.

"I look at Robinson, and he has a lot of weapons that guys in those days didn't have but guys since then do have, and guys since then have other weapons as well. Crawford can fight out of both stances, also level changes; there's not really any level changes or changes of looks on the part of Robinson. He gave you one look and one level the entire time. He's very fast and very strong, but again: A smart fighter will hone in on a target that doesn't change. Today, I think you have to have more options. And that's not to say Robinson wouldn't have implemented those things if he fought today.

"I see Crawford as a more complete fighter. Does that mean he wins? I'm not sure. There are wild card variables that can go either way – sometimes Crawford has the advantage, sometimes Robinson has the advantage. Gun to my head, I pick Crawford on points."

Prediction: Crawford PTS RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk, and you can follow him on X @AnsonWainwr1ght.

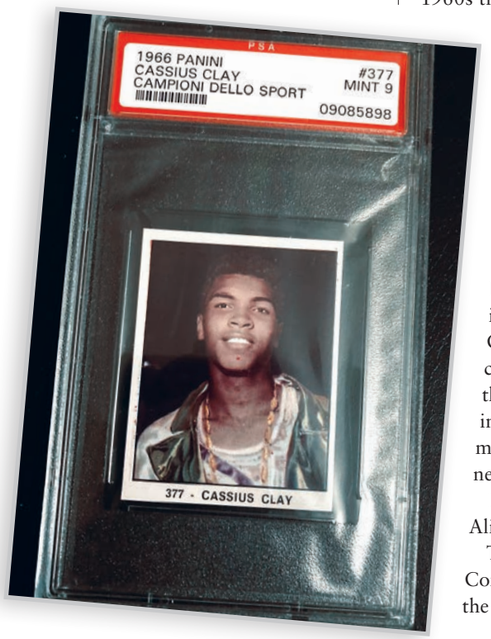
THE ROOKIE DEBATE

By Dan Rafael

Rookie cards rule in sports card collecting, even though in recent years players often have had dozens due to the volume of sets. Not to mention the short prints, numbered versions, autographed cards, parallels and variations in those sets.

But there is still a generally accepted rule of thumb that defines the modern rookie card. It must be the player's first licensed card from a major manufacturer showing them in their team's uniform; it must be part of a widely distributed set; and it's usually marked with an "RC" logo – as in "rookie card."

If only it were that easy in boxing, where for decades there has been a healthy debate among collectors about which issue represents Muhammad Ali's rookie card. "The Greatest" has several candidates but no definitive answer.



While many boxing cards were produced during the first half of the 1900s, usually as premiums that came with tobacco products, by the time Ali arrived on the scene in the early 1960s there were no widely distributed boxing sets being produced, although there were exhibit cards and multi-sport card and sticker sets that often included some boxers. What little product there was generally came from Europe.

Whichever candidate you view as Ali's rookie, remember: None refer to him as Muhammad Ali. He is listed by his birth name of Cassius Clay because he didn't change it until after winning the heavyweight championship in 1964, and even then, the card manufacturers refused to use his new name for many years.

Here are the candidates for Ali's rookie (in order of release):

The ESCO (Exhibit Supply Company) exhibit card is one of the earliest known Ali collectibles and has a good case as the rookie. It's larger than a typical trading card, smaller than a traditional postcard, has a blank back and is made of sturdy sepia-toned card stock. ESCO produced exhibit cards for decades depicting celebrities and athletes, including many boxers.

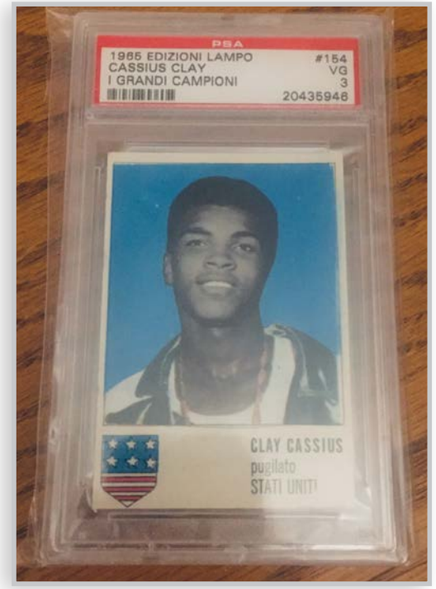
One of the series, produced from 1958 to 1962, was of 16 boxers and included Ali in a full-body boxing pose with a facsimile signature. The exact year the Ali card was first produced is unclear. While they didn't come in packs, the set was widely distributed. They were sold randomly for one penny in arcade vending machines.

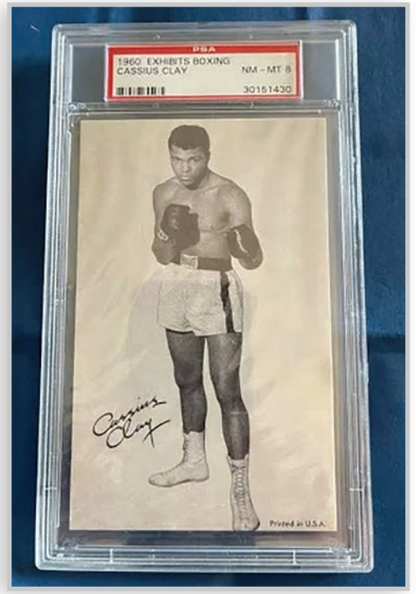
Many view the polarizing 1960 Hemmets Journal "card" as Ali's rookie. Many – myself included – do not at all consider it his rookie card because, well, it's not a card or sticker! Cool to have? Sure. A rookie card? No way. It's from a Swedish family magazine and is, you guessed it, magazine stock, which is the first problem. It was issued on a sheet containing photos of four athletes with holes punched on the left side of a white border and was meant to be put into a two-ring binder produced for the set. The photos were not meant to be separated like many card issues (think 1970s Twinkies boxes with cards on the back specifically meant to be cut apart and collected).

The Hemmets Journal is the opposite. It's impossible to separate the photos and have the photo and biographical information on the back line up because of the odd spacing. If you clip them apart, you'll cut off part of the words on the reverse. It meets none of the rookie card criteria and the group was obviously not intended to be treated as cards, so, therefore, it's not a rookie. What has given the issue relevance is that for some weird reason, third-party authenticator PSA agreed to grade them.

The Swedish Rekord Journal was a biweekly magazine that included inset head shots of two athletes next to each other on the lower right edge of each issue. Ali and European handballer Kjell Jarlenius were depicted on the cover of a February 1962 issue. Even though it's magazine stock, the inset was designed to be cut out from the cover, given that the biographical information on page 2 lines up with each photo and there is a line meant for an autograph. Still, it's hard to see this as a rookie card, because it's magazine paper.

The 1964 Simon Chocolates card from Spain, which came in packages of chocolate, has a good case as the rookie. It's Ali's first numbered, factory-cut card and was part of a set focused on major events from the previous three years. The cards, depicting historical figures and some athletes, were meant to be glued into a branded album. Many probably were, making untouched examples quite rare. While it meets most of the technical criteria of a rookie card, it's never been all that popular, because it's an oversized square and the photo is ugly as sin: Ali, his eyes nearly closed, is making a face with his mouth open and tongue out.





The 1964 Mac Robertson's Olympic quiz card didn't come in packs, as it was part of a multi-sport trivia game sold in Australia ahead of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Ali, as a 1960 Olympic gold medalist, fit the bill for inclusion. The cards are slightly smaller than a traditional card and they're extremely scarce, especially in high grade.

The 1965 Lampo from Italy is obscure but has a great case as the rookie because it's an actual card and could be pack-pulled as the main product, as opposed to the card serving as a premium to help sell something like tobacco or chocolate. The photo is a commonly used one of Ali from the Olympics wearing his gold medal. The same photo was on some of his other early card and sticker releases.

There are two versions: "Edizioni" and "Collezioni." The "Edizioni" version has Italian commentary on the back and is the rarer of the two. The "Collezioni" version has mostly a blank back except for the card number and brand name. Having two versions has added to collector and third-party authenticator confusion, and both are quite scarce.

Many consider the 1966 Panini sticker from Italy to be Ali's true rookie, as it meets all of the rookie card criteria. It was his first widely distributed card or sticker (at least in Europe) available in packs from a major manufacturer. Many of Panini's annual sets from 1966 to 1980 included Ali, and all of them incredulously referred to him as Cassius Clay! Decades later, Panini remains a major manufacturer, which adds to the 1966 issue's gravitas as the rookie. The sticker features the image of Ali from the 1960 Olympics that is also on the 1965 Lampo.

Panini stickers, which are smaller than traditional cards, are extraordinarily condition-sensitive because they are printed on very thin paper, making high-grade examples extremely tough to find. Most were peeled off the backing paper and pasted into the sticker album produced to house the multi-sport set.

HOW PREVALENT IS **DISORDERED EATING IN BOXERS?**

By Dr. Margaret Goodman

Making weight is an unending problem for fighters. As amateurs and young adults, they are often placed in weight classes below their natural body weight, and then they're poorly guided to move up as their growing bodies mature. This relegates them to dieting between contests, drastic weight cuts and chronically poor eating habits.

We all have trouble surrounding food, what to eat, how to lose weight – and for some, how to gain weight – but disordered eating and eating disorders are more prevalent in elite athletes than the rest of us. The International Olympic Committee published a consensus statement in 2019 called "Mental Health in Elite Athletes." They defined disordered eating as unhealthy structured behavior, but not damaging in the way that an eating disorder takes over your life and results in guilt, anxiety and depression.

Dr. David Conant-Norville, an Oregon-based psychiatrist who has worked with countless athletes, notes, "To understand the difference between the two disorders [it] can be compared to a heavy drinker versus an addiction to alcohol. It's obsessive behavior no one wants to discuss."

Former U.S. Olympic team member Danny O'Connor amassed 31 wins in 34 professional fights. He became an advocate for mental health and awareness of eating disorders in men and the danger of weight-cutting in combat sports. In an article published June 9, 2025, on the National Eating Disorders website, "Boxed In: My Battle With an Eating Disorder as a Male Athlete," O'Connor noted, "For most of my life, I was fighting in and out of the ring. […] But there was one fight I didn't know how to win, and I was too ashamed to talk about it: my battle with an eating disorder. [...] I did whatever it took – skipping meals, dehydrating myself and taking pharmaceutical laxatives – all in pursuit of an arbitrary number on a scale."

O'Connor thought he could manage this on his own, but little by little his body broke down: "In 2018, my body had reached its limit. What should have been the biggest fight of my career – an opportunity against world champion Jose Ramirez – ended in a hospital room just hours before the bout. I was suffering from severe dehydration, the result of pushing my body beyond its breaking point."

"It is similar to people who don't understand depression," says Conant-Norville. "Those around them don't understand the problem and say, 'Just do it' (or stop), but that never works."

Danny O'Connor was hospitalized while cutting weight in 2018.

Although there is little data on prevention, surroundings are crucial. Conant-Norville advises several athletes on the Professional Golfers' Association Tour: "Golfers travel constantly, but they always have healthy food available. It's most important for fighters to have a healthy environment that supports healthy eating." That may not be their coach, trainer or friend.

We all know fighters who balloon up in weight between bouts and use camp as "fat farms," leaving little time to actually train. O'Connor explained that after brutally cutting weight for every fight, he would compulsively overeat and rapidly regain the lost weight, which led to spirals of shame, self-loathing and isolation. In many, this can progress to depression, binge eating or bulimia. Bulimia is a serious eating disorder characterized by recurrent binge eating followed by inappropriate behavior to prevent weight gain, including using laxatives, excessive exercise, self-induced vomiting or fasting.

Making weight too often requires a Herculean effort, resulting in a career that is probably less successful than it would be if a fighter was dropping weight gradually or maintaining a weight close to their division. You only have to look at former world champions Bernard Hopkins, who always treated his body as a temple, and Floyd Mayweather Jr. as examples of maintaining healthy diets irrespective of what weight classes they chose.

Dr. Philip Goglia, author of the acclaimed best seller Turn up the Heat, "nutritionist to the stars" and founder of Performance Fitness Concepts in Santa Monica, California, has counseled many fighters to gain control over poor nutrition and weight issues. Goglia, who recovered from osteosarcoma in the '70s and later went on to win Mr. North America bodybuilding championships, says, "Manage your body weight at least two weeks before your event." He recommends that it be a staged process (as opposed to drastic weakening weight cuts) and that nutrition should be phased to maintain strength and health. "There are all kinds of cool legal mechanisms on- or offseason for fighters. You can cheat LEGALLY!"

Effectively treating athletes with eating disorders requires a multidisciplinary team that includes a therapist, dietician and a mental performance coach working together. It shouldn't end there. Prior to retirement, every fighter must find a sense of identity and purpose outside of boxing. Too often, boxing can become a fighter's only coping mechanism so that when they do retire, it can lead to substance abuse, depression or worse.

Whether you are a boxer or not, if you are suffering from disordered eating or an eating disorder, you are not alone. There are resources: the National Eating Disorders Association (nationaleatingdisorders.org). They can offer confidential screening. Or contact O'Connor's DO Boxing Academy at DOBoxingAcademy.com for guidance.

"I want to be a voice for other athletes, especially men, who feel like they have to suffer in silence," he said. "And I want to shed light on the dangerous, normalized weight-cutting practices that too many of us endure without questioning the long-term impact."

★ ★ ★ ★

Victor Conte (1950-2025) A True Story

When I was working as a Nevada State Athletic Commission ring physician and later as chair of the commission's medical advisory board, it was clear that mixed martial arts had a serious PED problem. But boxing was not far behind. After leaving the commission, former NSAC commissioner Dr. Flip Homansky and I lobbied commissioners to recognize the fact that combat sports, like every other sport, desperately needed more effective and expanded PED testing.

Two individuals were exceptionally helpful and generous in sharing their knowledge when we formed the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (VADA). One was Dr. Don Catlin, who many consider the father of the anti-doping movement and the man who set up the first U.S. anti-doping lab – UCLA's Olympic Analytical Laboratory. The other was Victor Conte, who had been imprisoned for developing and providing PEDs to athletes. Ironically, the two men had crossed paths in 2003 when Dr. Catlin identified and developed a test to detect tetrahydrogestrinone ("The Clear") in an athlete's system – a product produced by Conte in his BALCO facility in San Marcos, California. Without Dr. Catlin's efforts, Conte might have never been caught.

Dr. Catlin served as VADA's scientific adviser from its inception until his death in 2024. Victor, from his prison release until the day he died on November 4, served as a forceful advocate for clean sports.

Conte advised the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, the World Anti-Doping Agency and many others, including VADA, in an effort to curb illegal PED use in sports. He pushed to keep the topic of PEDs in the forefront of conversations about boxing.

He also required that any fighter he worked with (and advocated for those he didn't) to demonstrate their commitment to clean sport by enrolling in VADA.

May Victor rest in peace. We have one less outspoken advocate for clean sports in a world where fighters risk their lives. And that is very sad. RING

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Paulie Malignaggi showed serious heart against Miguel Cotto.

THE DAY AFTER A FIGHT

By Thomas Hauser

Boxing fans watch a fight on television, go to sleep when it's over, and their lives are unchanged the following day.

No two fighters process things precisely the same way. But for all fighters, the day after a fight is dominated physically and psychologically by the night before.

"One of the things I hated most was losing a fight and having to get on a plane the next day and everyone is staring at you," Paulie Malignaggi told me long ago. "If you win, you can say. 'Yeah, I won.' The bruising and swelling is like a badge of honor. If you lost, you're self-conscious about it, especially if people don't know you're a fighter and look at you like, 'That punk got beaten up.'"

In 2006, Malignaggi fought a heroic battle against Miguel Cotto in a WBO 140-pound championship fight at Madison Square Garden. Malignaggi's right eye socket was broken in the second round. His jaw was horribly swollen. He went the distance – winning four rounds on two of the judges' scorecards and five on the third – but lost.

"I had to wait a week for the swelling to go down before they performed the surgery," Malignaggi recalled. "For a long time, I couldn't do things I wanted to do. Not just in boxing, but in the rest of my life too. Italy won the World Cup that year. I spent a lot of time that summer watching soccer on television."

Sergio Mora moved into the spotlight when he emerged triumphant on season one of The Contender. Later, he claimed the WBC 154-pound title.

"We all hurt the day after a fight," Mora says. "But if you win, no matter how sore you are, it's worth it."

But it's not that simple.

In 2014, Seanie Monaghan won a 10-round decision over Elvir Muriqi at Barclays Center.

"He headbutted me," Monaghan later recounted. "It felt like someone slammed a bowling ball into my face. My orbital bone was broken in two places. It broke my nose and severed a tendon. I needed internal and external stitches, and they had to reattach the tendon I use to lift

my eyelid. When I woke up the morning after the fight, the pillow was stuck to my face because of all the blood."

In 1986, Evander Holyfield outwilled Dwight Muhammad Qawi over 15 brutal rounds to claim the WBA cruiserweight crown. After the fight – bruised, battered and badly dehydrated – Holyfield was taken to the hospital for overnight observation. "I lay in that bed," he later remembered. "And even though I won, I said out loud, 'Oh, Lord, I don't know if I want to do this anymore.'"

I recently asked a half-dozen fighters about the day after a fight. Their thoughts follow:

BERNARD HOPKINS

"The punishment starts in the gym when you're preparing for the fight. The training is the beginning of the trauma. There's weeks of sparring and getting hit. When you're in the locker room after sparring six, eight rounds in the gym, it doesn't matter how old you are; trust me, you feel pain.

"The climax of the trauma is the fight. If it was a fight that went into the late rounds against a talented guy, I felt it more. The fight that took the most out of me was my first fight against Segundo Mercado. It was in Ecuador at high altitude. I got knocked down twice. I was hurt bad, completely out of gas, and they scored it a draw. The next time we fought, I knocked him out. But whether you win or lose doesn't affect the physical trauma. Your mind knows whether you won or lost a fight. Your body doesn't.

"There were times the day after a fight when I felt like I'd played running back and carried the ball 20 times with no blocking and eight or nine people trying to tackle me on every play. And it gets harder as you get older because your body responds differently. To wake up the morning after a fight when you're in your twenties is different from your thirties or forties. The older you get, the more pain you feel. The body reminds you that you aren't in your twenties anymore. But I never asked myself after a fight if it was worth it. Once I signed the contract, that decision was made."

GERRY COONEY

"Physically, I usually felt pretty good the day after a fight. Most of my fights didn't go that long and, for most of my career, I was in good shape. Even after I lost to Larry [Holmes], I felt OK physically the next day. And mentally, I told myself, 'Hey, I was in with a great champion who was just better than me last night.'

"The worst day after a fight for me was when I fought Michael Spinks. I was disappointed after I lost to Larry. I was ashamed after I lost to Spinks. I'd been drinking and drugging and got knocked out by a guy who shouldn't have beaten me. But it happened. Then I bottomed out and got the help I needed. My life is so much better now than the life I had when I was boxing. I think about the Spinks fight now and what might have been. But what makes me sadder is I see Michael from time to time and he's not in good shape. Whatever the event is, he just stares into space."

DMITRIY SALITA

"Physically, when I was young and fighting four-round fights, the level of competition wasn't as high as I'd fought in the amateurs. So the day after a fight wasn't that different than the day after a sparring session. Then the fights got harder. After a fight, I'd take three arnica pills in the dressing room to bring down the swelling. And there were mornings after a fight when my hands were so swollen that I couldn't pick up a cup of coffee. But it's a great high psychologically when you win, so I'd tell myself that the aches and pains were just part of the process and my progress.

"Psychologically, my loss to Amir Khan was very difficult. I was undefeated. It was a world title fight. And it ended in the first round. I was knocked down three times. It was hard to pick myself up after that. I questioned myself and what I was doing, not just the day after the fight but for a long time. Finally, I asked myself, 'What can I learn from this that makes me a better fighter and a better person?' But it took a while for me to get there."

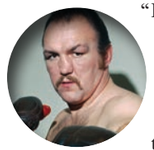
TIM BRADLEY

"Usually, the psychological pain comes with a loss. But for me, psychologically, the hardest time after a fight was a fight I won – the first Pacquiao fight. They announced that I was the winner. I was on top of the world. And then the world caved in on me. I was attacked in the media. I got death threats. People treated me like I stole something. I wound up in the darkest place I've ever been in.

"My next fight was against [Ruslan] Provodnikov. And because I'd been abused by the media and the public as badly as I was after Pacquiao, I fought recklessly against Provodnikov. I could have outboxed him. But I felt I had something to prove, so I chose to stand and punch with him. In some ways, it was one of the most glorious moments of my career because of the way the world accepted me afterward. But as the fight went on, I could feel the physical damage to me mounting. You have to ignore the pain. But believe me; I felt it. I knew the punishment I was taking would shorten my career and maybe worse.

"I had symptoms for months after that fight. My speech was slurred. I had headaches and nightmares. My balance was off. And all of the support I had before the fight was gone. The fans were gone. My manager and promoter weren't there. It was just me and my wife and the rest of my family. Finally, my condition got better. Some of that was from therapy and doctors, and some of it was healing through time."

CHUCK WEPNER



"I'm the only man who fought Muhammad Ali, George Foreman and Sonny Liston. I'm very proud of that.

"The Foreman fight wasn't bad the day after, because he didn't hit me that much. It was one punch around the eye in Round 3 that cut me down to the bone. And that was it. They stopped it. I needed 53 stitches, but the rest of me didn't feel so bad.

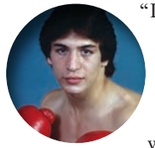
"With Ali, I had a lot of nicks and cuts. But the big thing was I was completely exhausted. [Referee] Tony Perez stopped it after I got knocked down with 19 seconds left in the last round. Championship fights were 15 rounds in those days. I wish he'd let it go on so I could have gone the distance, but he didn't. The exhaustion lasted for a day or two. But after that, I was all right.

"Liston was the worst afterward. I always fought aggressively without much defense. Against Liston, my corner wanted me to stick and move and box, but that wasn't my style. The referee stopped it on cuts after the ninth round. I needed 72 stitches, which was my personal record. The stitches inside my mouth were especially painful and the rest of me didn't feel so good either. To be honest with you, I took a beating. I was in bed for a week after that fight. I thought seriously about retiring. But then I decided to keep fighting. And you know the rest. I wound up fighting Ali, and that led to *Rocky*."

Wepner received 72 stitches after doing battle with Sonny Liston.

Bettmann

RAY MANCINI



"If it's a physical fight, your body is very sore. But if you're young and you win, it's a good sore. You're worn out, but it's a good hurt. When you lose, you feel the pain more. The pain when you lose goes deep into your soul.

"The most physical pain I had after a fight was after the Arguello fight. That was my first loss, so there was a lot of emotional pain too.

"Duk-Koo Kim was more physically taxing than any fight I ever had except Arguello. [Author note: Mancini defended his WBA lightweight title against Kim on November 13, 1982. It was a brutal back-and-forth slugfest that ended when Mancini knocked Kim down at the start of the 14th round. The challenger rose to his feet but was ruled unable to continue. He died five days later.]

"I didn't know Kim was in that kind of trouble. I caught him at the beginning of the 14th round and he went down. He got up. They stopped the fight. I went to his corner to congratulate him on a great fight. The ring was a madhouse. When they interviewed me on television, I didn't know he'd been carried out on a stretcher. Later that afternoon, I was in my hotel room, holding an ice pack under my eye. My mother and father were with me. Murphy Griffith (Mancini's trainer) came in and said, 'Something bad happened. It don't look good.' That was the first time I knew there was a serious problem. Right then, I went from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. When he died, I hit rock bottom. As a fighter, you know the possibilities. But when you have to deal with it, when the worst thing happens..." RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book is The Most Honest Sport: Two More Years Inside Boxing. *In 2019, Hauser was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*

COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

BUCKLE UP FOR '26

By Randy Gordon

Jaron Ennis is finally within reach of elite-level matchups to prove his potential.

Aside from my pet peeve in boxing – I wish boxers would fight more than twice a year – I think 2025 was a very interesting year. I also think 2026 is going to be even better and more exciting.

The Zuffa Boxing deal with Paramount+ is going to be huge. Over the last 35 years, our great sport has been taken away from potential new fans with the slow and continued disappearance of broadcast vehicles. One by one, they left.

ABC … CBS … NBC … USA Network … The MSG Network … HBO … Showtime … ESPN.

At some point, I worked for all of them except ABC and CBS. It was tough to see each one of them take boxing away from you and me.

You can't have eight major carriers of boxing say "arrivederci" to boxing and expect the sport to thrive, much less survive.

But now, thanks to Zuffa/TKO Boxing, the sport is punching its way back into our homes. The deal with Paramount+ begins in January. Major boxing matches will be coming our way very soon. It's likely that some will even be on Paramount-owned CBS-TV. There will be, according to Dana White, "at least 12" events in 2026. That's not "as many as." That's "at least!" Those words are truly something to say "Happy New Year" to.

★★★★

As I think about the year ahead, there are three matches I would like to see more than any others. Here are my top three:

1. Naoya Inoue vs. Junto Nakatani

There will be no bigger matchup in the sport than the clash of these two Japanese megastars. First, they must each get past undefeated opponents on the same card on December 27 in Riyadh. Should that happen, they'll face each other in May at the Tokyo Dome, packed with over 55,000 rabid boxing fans lucky enough to watch my pre-pick for "Fight of the Year."

2. Fabio Wardley vs. Moses Itauma

I'd be shocked if this one actually happens in 2026, but it most definitely is a fight I want to see. The holdup on this matchup is that Itauma – who will be 21 on December 28 – has only had 13 fights, totaling just 26 mostly partial rounds of action. His two decision wins have been in six-rounders. A fight against the super-resilient and heavy-handed Wardley would be career suicide for Itauma, in my humble opinion.

Mark Robinson

3. Jaron Ennis vs. Bakhram Murtazaliev

Ennis has P4P No. 1 written all over him. The unbeaten Murtazaliev is one of the most fearsome – and avoided – world titleholders in boxing. An Ennis-Murtazaliev matchup is nothing less than a "Fight of the Year" candidate.

Then I have these thoughts about what *will* happen in 2026:

Terence Crawford will win a portion of the middleweight title, perhaps taking on the winner of Janibek Alimkhanuly and Erislandy Lara. It will be his sixth divisional title.

The Inoue-Nakatani winner vs. Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez. After Inoue and Nakatani WOW the sports world with an unforgettable performance in Tokyo, the winner will take on the challenge of Rodriguez, who will be doing what Crawford did against Canelo Alvarez by moving up two weight divisions.

In 2026, I see Andy Cruz beating Ray Muratalla on January 14 for the IBF lightweight title. Cruz will then face Keyshawn Davis – after Davis gets his head together and his career back on track.

Jai Opetaia will face Gilberto Ramirez. Then, regardless of who wins, both will announce they are moving into the heavyweight division.

I eagerly await the comeback of the man I call boxing's most exciting fighter, Ryan Rozicki. I think his return in 2026 will lead him to win the Comeback of the Year.

Teremoana Teremoana is an unbeaten 27-year-old Australian heavyweight who packs around 270 pounds on his 6-foot-6 frame. He is a punching machine who brings the kind of excitement into the ring that Mike Tyson used to bring when he first turned pro. At the time of writing, Teremoana has had three fights in 2025, winning all by first-round KO, and he's scheduled to fight a fourth time this year. I hope he fights *every week* in 2026. Nobody is more watchable and exciting than he is!

Jasmine Artiga is 115 pounds of explosiveness. She will leave no doubt in 2026 that she is P4P the No. 1 female boxer in the world. She is 14-0-1 (7 KOs) and nicknamed "The Animal" for good reason.

I see Anthony Joshua and Deontay Wilder finally facing one another in 2026. It's a fight that should have happened in 2017, when both were unbeaten titleholders. At this point, it doesn't matter who wins, as their best days are small images in each man's rearview mirror, but a Joshua-Wilder fight can be nothing but a short, exciting slobberknocker!

Then there are my dream matches. As we know, dreams sometimes come true.

I would love for this dream to come true:

Laila Ali vs. Claressa Shields

Claressa wants it. She wants her ultimate challenge. However, Laila hasn't fought since 2007. She is 48. She has given thought to the match, but, as of this writing, has not made a decision. Don't expect an Ali comeback. However, it would be a fun fight to watch.

And there is this dream matchup:

Manny Pacquiao vs. Floyd Mayweather II

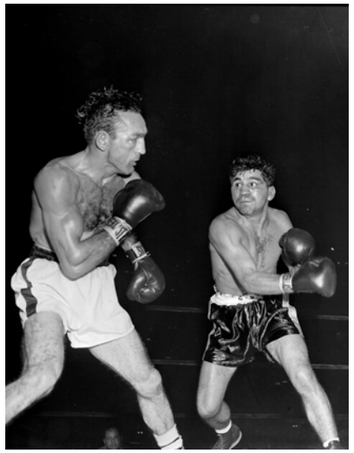
I thought about this matchup back in June, when I was inducted, along with the PacMan, into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. While waiting in a side room to be introduced, I was talking with Manny about the excitement he was feeling from being inducted and about his then-upcoming title challenge against WBC welterweight titleholder Mario Barrios. I told him I had a question for him, a thought I'd had since I heard of his comeback. Just then, my name was called. He gave me a pat on the back and said, "Hold that thought. Go get 'em!" After each of us had delivered our acceptance speech, we were asked to pose for the cameras, each of us extending our fists wearing our newly acquired IBHOF ring. As we were lining up, he motioned me to stand next to him. As the Class of 2025 showed their rings, Pacquiao leaned close and asked, "What was that thought you had before?" I smiled. After the photos were taken, I turned to him and asked, "When you win the title, will you be calling out Floyd Mayweather for some, let's say, 'Unfinished Business?' He smiled back and gave me a fist bump. Then he nodded his head. Nothing needed to be said. He wants the rematch. I believe $$$Mayweather wants it, too. I believe it will happen in 2026. Floyd will use his play exhibition with Mike Tyson in the spring of 2026 as a sort of tuneup.

Not everyone views Floyd Mayweather vs. Manny Pacquiao 2 in a negative light.

★★★★

In 2026 I also hope for the retirement – the hanging up of the gloves – of a great fighter.

The fighter's name is Oleksandr Usyk. If he hangs around and beats guys like Fabio Wardley and Moses Itauma, are we going to remember him more for beating them or getting crushed by them, which just may happen if he stays around too long. I say the latter. RING



WELTER WARRIORS:
After winning the welterweight championship in June 1955, Carmen Basilio contested two non-title bouts before scheduling his maiden defense against the man he'd dethroned. On November 30 of that year, Tony DeMarco gave everything of himself in pursuit of regaining the crown at Boston Garden. He hurt Basilio (white trunks) on numerous occasions but was unable to fully thwart the champ's vaunted aggression. As was the case in their first slugfest, Basilio prevailed via TKO 12. The rematch was named The Ring Fight of the Year, the first of four consecutive awards in that category to involve Basilio. No fighter has matched that since.

"After the fifth round, I knew he would run out of gas. It was just a question of time." — Carmen Basilio

FIGHTLINE

BY DOUG FISCHER

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face: A young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

This month we're linking the GOAT with TBE – **Sugar Ray Robinson** and **Floyd Mayweather Jr.**

Robinson, who helped popularize the concept of "pound for pound," was arguably the fighter of the decade for both the 1940s and the 1950s. Tall (5-foot-11), lean and rangy with a lithe but powerful dancer's physique, the pride of Harlem was a complete fighter, adept at every punch and as ring savvy as he was fierce and dynamic.

Robinson, who turned pro in late 1940, immediately drew comparisons to legendary fighters such as Joe Gans and Benny Leonard while still a lightweight prospect. By the time he matured into a welterweight contender in 1942, he was considered the best boxer in the sport, winning The Ring's Fighter of the Year award. While he was a near-untouchable force at welterweight, where he won his first world championship in 1946, his legacy was solidified at middleweight, where he was a five-time champion during the 1950s.

At the end of 1950, less than two months prior to winning his first middleweight championship from archrival Jake LaMotta, Robinson had amassed an astounding 121-1-2 (79 KOs) record. His lone loss was to LaMotta, whom he defeated in five of their six showdowns. Robinson's many memorable bouts with other Hall of Fame-enshrined middleweight champs during the '50s – Randy Turpin, Carl "Bobo" Olson, Rocky Graziano, Gene Fullmer and Carmen Basilio – captivated the American public and fight fans around the world.

Mayweather Jr. – the son of former welterweight contender Floyd Mayweather and nephew of two-division world titleholder Roger Mayweather – epitomized the words "pedigree" and "prodigy." The 1996 Olympic bronze medalist was arguably the sport's finest combination of talent, skill and technique during the late '90s and throughout the 2000s.

Like Robinson, it didn't take long for Mayweather to establish himself as an elite-level boxer. The Las Vegas-based Michigan native won his first world title just two years after his pro debut by halting respected veteran Genaro Hernandez after eight rounds. Over the next three years, he established himself as one of the best junior lightweights of all time – defending the WBC belt eight times, turning back the challenges of fellow future Hall of Famer Diego Corrales, Jesus Chavez, Carlos Hernandez and Angel Manfredy.

World titles followed at lightweight, junior welterweight, welterweight and junior middleweight, and with those accomplishments Mayweather scored victories over Jose Luis Castillo, Zab Judah, Canelo Alvarez, Marcos Maidana and fellow Hall of Famers Shane Mosley and Manny Pacquiao.

There are multiple paths linking the pound-for-pound royals, whose primes are separated by at least 60 years, but we found this seven-boxer Fightline.

Can you find a faster route?

If so, or if you have another Fightline you'd like to submit, send it to comeoutwriting@gmail.com. And remember, some fighters can be linked on paper by jumping forward and backward in time, but to be a true lineage, the fights must come in chronological order. RING

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how stc is cyber-protecting Riyadh Season

Guarding the Gate: The Invisible Fight for Riyadh Season

The boxing world went all-in on Riyadh Season, and for good reason. November 22 saw "The Ring IV: Night of the Champions" land in the capital, with David Benavidez and Anthony Yarde topping a bill that had the purists talking.

But while all eyes were on the fighters, the real main event, the one with millions on the line, was already happening. It was the invisible, high-stakes fight to protect the show itself.

Let's talk about the purse. The fighters' prize money was just the beginning. The true value was in the hundreds of millions in global broadcast rights, the data from every fan buying a digital ticket, and the integrity of the live feed hitting millions of screens.

And it had a big target painted on its back.

In the world of cybersecurity, a high-profile live event is a complex target. Attackers don't just aim for one thing. They target ticketing portals to harvest fan credit cards. They hammer the global broadcast feed with Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, trying to disrupt the stream. They even probe the stadium's internal network, looking for a way to compromise digital turnstiles or concession stands.

This is where stc group, the outfit powering the digital side of Riyadh Season, stepped in. To handle the massive load, they deployed infrastructure at 60 key locations: 34 fixed and mobile towers at outdoor sites, 24 indoor towers, and 2 small cells. stc even rolled in four additional mobile communication stations and expanded the network with 100 MHz bandwidth on the N77 frequency to ensure speed never dropped, even during the main event.

Building the network was just the start. Defending it was the hard part.

For an event of this scale, the defense has to be as professional as the offense. It demands a dedicated digital war room in Riyadh, a 24/7 Security Operations Center (SOC). The job is to monitor a constant flow of data for any sign of a breach.

This kind of active threat hunting is a specialized, professional digital security operation. It's not a passive defense, waiting for an alarm to go off. It means proactively using Threat Intelligence to model potential attacks, understand who the likely attackers are, and hunt for the vulnerabilities they might exploit.

This means looking for anyone trying to crash the broadcast feed, steal fan data, or shut down the ticket gates. And if a threat is detected, it means having a rapid incident response plan ready to execute in seconds to contain, eradicate, and recover, long before any fan would notice.

For the fan watching at home, the best sign of this work was... nothing. It was the knockout punch landing on their screen without a glitch. It was the final bell ringing without a single second of dead air.

As Riyadh Season continues to establish itself as a global powerhouse for entertainment, it also sets a new standard for digital security. For stc group, whose reputation is built on being a world-class telecom provider and digital expert, this is the invisible, high-stakes world they are built to secure.

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